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A LINE is a line in its minutest subdivisions, straight or crooked. It is itself, not intermeasurable by anything else. Such is Job. But since the French Revolution Englishmen are all intermeasurable by one another: certainly a happy state of agreement, in which I for one do not agree. God keep you and me from the divinity of yes and no too—the yea, nay, creeping Jesus—from supposing up and down to be the same thing, as all experimentalists must suppose.

BLAKE: April 12, 1827





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## EDITOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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A. K.



## INTRODUCTION

*The real man, the imagination.*

In 1827 there died, undoubtedly unknown to each other, two plebeian Europeans of supreme originality: Ludwig van Beethoven and William Blake. Had they known of each other, they could still not have known how much of the future they contained and how alike they were in the quality of their personal force, their defiance of the age, and the fierce demands each other had made on the human imagination.

It is part of the story of Blake's isolation from the European culture of his time that he could have known of Beethoven, who enjoyed a reputation in the London of the early 1800's. The Ninth Symphony was in fact commissioned by the London Philharmonic, who made Beethoven's last days a little easier. The artistic society of the day was appreciative of Beethoven. It ignored the laborious little engraver, shut off by his work and reputed madness, who was known mainly to a few painters, and held by most of them to be a charming crank.

It is hard to imagine Blake going to concerts or reading accounts of Beethoven's music. He never traveled. Except for one three-year stay at a cottage in Sussex, he hardly went out of London. Like his father and brothers, he lived the life of a small tradesman—at one time he kept a printshop. He was always very poor, and generally worked in such seclusion that at one period, near the end of his life, he did not leave his house for

two years, except to go out for porter. Blake had instinctive musical gifts; in his youth and old age he spontaneously, when in company, sang melodies to his own lyrics. Musicians who heard them set them down; I wish I knew where. Even on his deathbed, where he worked to the last, he composed songs. But he had no formal musical knowledge and apparently no interest in musical thought. Self-educated in every field except engraving, to which he had been apprenticed at fourteen, his only interest in most ideas outside his own was to refute them. He always lived and worked very much alone, with a wife whom he trained to be the mirror of his mind. The world let him alone. He was entirely preoccupied with his designs, his poems, and the burden—which he felt more than any writer whom I know—of the finiteness of man before the whole creation.

Beethoven's isolation was different. He was separated from society by his deafness, his pride, his awkward relations with women, relatives, patrons, inadequate musicians. He was isolated, as all original minds are, by the need to develop absolutely in his own way. The isolation was made tragic, against his will, by his deafness and social pride. At the same time he was one of the famous virtuosos of Europe, the heir of Mozart and the pupil of Haydn, and the occasional grumpy favorite of the musical princes of Vienna. His isolation was an involuntary personal tragedy, as it was by necessity a social fact. He did not resign himself to it, and only with the greatest courage learned to submit to it. If he was solitary, it was in a great tradition. As he was influenced by his predecessors, so he became the fountainhead of the principal musical thought that came after him.

Blake's isolation was—I sometimes think it still is—absolute. It was the isolation of a mind that sought to make the best of heaven and earth, in the image of

neither. It was isolation of a totally different kind of human vision; of an unappeasable longing for the absolute integration of man, in his total nature, with the universe. It was the isolation of a temperament run on fixed ideas; and incidentally, of a craftsman who could not earn a living. There are analogies to Blake's position in a world which has so many displaced persons as our own; but they are inadequate. Blake's isolation may be likened to that of the revolutionary who sits in his grubby room writing manifestoes against a society that pays him no attention, with footnotes against other revolutionaries who think him mad. It was that of the author who prints his own books. It was that of the sweetly smiling crank who sits forever in publishers' offices, with a vast portfolio under his arm, explaining with undiminishable confidence that only through his vision will the world be saved. It was that of the engraver who stopped getting assignments because he turned each one into an act of independent creation. Blake was a lyric poet interested chiefly in ideas, and a painter who did not believe in nature. He was a commercial artist who was a genius in poetry, painting, and religion. He was a libertarian obsessed with God; a mystic who reversed the mystical pattern, for he sought man as the end of his search. He was a Christian who hated the churches; a revolutionary who abhorred the materialism of the radicals. He was a drudge, sometimes living on a dollar a week, who called himself "a mental prince"; and was one.

There are other points of difference between Blake and Beethoven, important to recognize before we can appreciate their likeness. With Beethoven we are in the stream of modern secular culture. Beethoven, the enduring republican and anti-Bonapartist, the social dramatist of *Fidelio*, the jealous admirer of Goethe, the cele-

brant of Schiller's call to the joyous brotherhood of man, is a central figure in *our* history, as Blake never has been. We remember Beethoven the moralist, the Beethoven who felt so gratefully at home in the world of Kant that he copied out a sentence, probably at second-hand, and kept it on his work-table—"The starry heavens above us and the moral law within us. Kant!!!" To Blake the "moral law" was a murderous fiction and the stars were in the heavens because man's imagination saw them there. Beethoven speaks to our modern humanity in tones we have learned to prize as our own and our greatest, as Blake has not yet; he is uneasily religious and spiritually frustrated, in a familiar agnostic way, where Blake is the "immoralist" and "mystic" by turns. Beethoven could not hear the world, but he always believed in it. His struggles to sustain himself in it, on the highest level of his creative self-respect, were vehement because he could never escape the tyranny of the actual. He was against material despotisms, and knew them to be real. Blake was also against them; but he came to see every hindrance to man's imaginative self-liberation as a fiction bred by the division in man himself. He was against society *in toto*: its prisons, churches, money, morals, fashionable opinions; he did not think that the faults of society stemmed from the faulty organization of society. To him the only restriction over man are always in his own mind—the "mind-forg'd manacles."

With Blake, it would seem, we are off the main track of modern secular thought and aspiration. The textbooks label him "mystic," and that shuts him off from us. Actually he is not off the main track, but simply ahead of it; a peculiarly disturbed and disturbing prophet of the condition of modern man rather than a master-builder. From any conventional point of view he is too

different in kind to be related easily to familiar conceptions of the nature of the individual and society. Blake combines, for example, the formal devotional qualities of the English dissenters with the intellectual daring of Nietzsche, the Marquis de Sade, and Freud. No Christian saint ever came to be more adoring of Jesus, and no naturalistic investigator was a more candid opponent of traditional Christian ethics. He was one of the subtlest and most far-reaching figures in the intellectual liberation of Europe that took place at the end of the eighteenth century. But he had no interest in history, and easily relapsed into primitive nationalism. To the end of his life his chief symbol for man, "the eternal man," was Albion; the origin of "natural religion" he located among the Druids; he hated Newton and despised Voltaire, but painted the apotheosis of Nelson and Pitt. Like so many self-educated men, he was fanatically learned; but he read like a Fundamentalist—to be inspired or to refute. He painted by "intellectual vision"—that is, he painted ideas; his imagination was so original that it carried him to the borders of modern surrealism. Yet he would have been maddened by the intellectual traits of surrealism: the calculated insincerities, the defiant disorder, the autonomous decorative fancy, the intellectual mockery and irreverence. That part of surrealism which is not art is usually insincerity, and to Blake any portion of insincerity was a living death. As he hated church dogma, so he hated scepticism, doubt, experimentalism. He did not believe in sin, only in "intellectual error"; he loathed every dualistic conception of good and evil; the belief that any human being could be punished, here or elsewhere, for "following his energies." But he thought that unbelief—that is, the admission of uncertainty on the part of any person—was wicked. He understood that man's vital energies

cannot be suppressed or displaced without causing distortion; he saw into the personal motivations of human conflict and the many concealments of it which are called culture. He celebrated in *Songs of Innocence*, with extraordinary inward understanding, the imaginative separateness of the child. He hated scientific investigation. He could say in his old age, when provoked, that he believed the world was flat. He was undoubtedly sincere, but he did not really care what shape it was; he would not have believed any evidence whatsoever that there were many planets and universes. He did not believe in God; under all his artistic labors and intellectual heresies he seems to have thought of nothing else. He is one of the most prophetic and gifted rebels in the history of Western man—a man peculiarly of our time, with the divisions of our time. Some of his ideas were automatically superstitious, and a large part of his writing is rant. There are features of his thought that carry us beyond the subtlest understanding we have of the relations between man and woman, the recesses of the psyche, the meaning of human error, tyranny, and happiness. There are chapters in his private mythology that carry us into a nightmare world of loneliness and fanaticism, like a scream repeated interminably on a record in which a needle is stuck.

Yet Blake is very much like Beethoven in his artistic independence and universality. Like Beethoven, he is a pioneer Romantic of that heroic first generation which thought that the flames of the French Revolution would burn down all fetters. Like Beethoven, he asserts the creative freedom of the imagination within his work and makes a new world of thought out of it. There sounds all through Blake's poetry, from the boyish and smiling defiance of neo-classic formalism in *Poetical Sketches*,

The languid strings do scarcely move!

The sound is forc'd, the notes are few!

to the vision of man the divine in *Jerusalem* that lyric despair mingled with quickness to exaltation, that sense of a primal intelligence fighting the mind's limitations, that brings Beethoven's last quartets so close to absolute meditation and the Ninth Symphony to a succession of triumphal marches. What is nearest and first in both men is so strong a sense of their own identity that they are always reaching beyond man's conception of his powers. In both there is a positive assertion against suffering, an impatience with forms and means. As Beethoven said of the violinist who complained of the difficulty of one of the Rasumofsky quartets—"Does he really suppose I think of his puling little fiddle when the spirit speaks to me and I compose something?"—so to Blake the forms he uses in his last Prophetic Books, even to their very narrative coherence, are nothing before the absoluteness of his vision. In both life becomes synonymous with the will.

There, however, the resemblance ends. For Beethoven does not block our way by asking us to read him in symbols of his own invention. He is subtle, moving, reflective, in a language which we share because he has made it possible for us to share in it. Out of a limited number of musical tones and devices, he has organized his thought and impressed his conception in such a way that his difference is all *in* his art. When we have grasped his meaning something has enriched our lives without dislodging them. Beethoven is as luminously human as he is creatively independent; he can be gay; he parodies; he introduces a little Russian tune to compliment a patron; he is fond of bearish jokes. He is often difficult, but never impossible. He does not challenge

man's submission to the natural order; he finds his place in it, and often in such deep wells of serenity, of happiness in his own struggle, that the song that rises from him almost at the very end, in his last quartet, is for a dance. "Must it be?" he wrote on the manuscript. "It must be. It must be." He may have been thinking of something less than man's ultimate relation to life. But the idea that something *must be* is what is most hateful to Blake's mind.

For Blake accepts nothing—not the God who is supposed to have proposed it this way, or the man who is constrained to dispose it in any way he can. Blake begins with a longing so deep, for all that is invisible and infinite to man under the dominion of God, matter, and reason, that he tears away the shell of earth, the prison of man in his own senses, to assert that there is nothing but man and that man is nothing but the highest flights of his own imagination. With his little tradesman's look, his fanatical industriousness, his somber qualities of the English dissenter and petty-bourgeois, he begins with so absolute a challenge to the religion that was dying in his age, and to the scientific materialism that arose in it, that he transcends them both—into a world that is exalted and often beautiful, but of which he alone saw the full detail.

To understand this is to pass up the usual tags. Blake is seeking something which is analogous to mysticism, but he is not in any ordinary sense a mystic. He is very much in the stream of thought which led to naturalism, but he is not a naturalist. It is more important, however, to show what he shares with us rather than with the mystics. Only those who want to make a Blake easy to explain and apologize for, convenient for the textbooks,

can see him as a queer and harmless "mystic." As D. H. Lawrence said of his work, "They'll say as they said of Blake: It's mysticism, but they shan't get away with it, not this time: Blake's wasn't mysticism, neither is this." Even at the end, when Blake celebrated Jesus as his great friend and deliverer, we have in "The Everlasting Gospel:"

The Vision of Christ that thou dost see  
Is my Vision's Greatest Enemy:

. . . .  
Thine is the friend of all Mankind,  
Mine speaks in parables to the Blind:  
Thine loves the same world that mine hates,  
Thy Heaven doors are my Hell gates.

Christian mysticism is founded on dualism. It is rooted in the belief that man is a battleground between the spirit and the flesh, between the temptations of earth and God as the highest Good. The mystic way is the logical and extreme manifestation of the spiritual will, obedient to a faith in supernatural authority, to throw off the body and find an ultimate release in the God-head. Christian mysticism is based upon a mortification of the body so absolute that it attains a condition of ecstasy. To the mystic, God is the nucleus of the Creation, and man in his earthly life is a dislodged atom that must find its way back. The mystic begins with submission to a divine order, which he accepts with such conviction that earthly life becomes nothing to him. He lives only for the journey of the soul that will take him away, upward to God. What would be physical pain to others, to him is purgation; what would be doubt to others, to him is hell; what would be death for others, to him is the final consummation—and one he tries to reach in the living body.

Blake has the mystic's tormented sense of the doubleness of life between reality and the ideal. But he tries to resolve it on earth, in the living person of man. Up to 1800 he also thought that it could be resolved in society, under the inspiration of the American and French Revolutions. Blake is against everything that submits, mortifies, constricts and denies. Mystics are absent-minded reactionaries; they accept indifferently everything in the world except the barriers that physical existence presents to the soul's inner quest. Blake is a revolutionary. He ceased to be a revolutionary in the political sense after England went to war with France and tried to destroy the revolution in Europe. That was less out of prudent cowardice—though like every other radical and free-thinker of the time he lived under a Tory reign of terror—than because he had lost faith in political action as a means to human happiness. Even in politics, however, his libertarian thought became a challenge to all the foundations of society in his time. Blake is not only unmystical in the prime sense of being against the mystic's immediate concerns and loyalties; he is against all accepted Christianity. He is against the churches,

Remove away that black'ning church:  
Remove away that marriage hearse:  
Remove away that place of blood:  
You'll quite remove the ancient curse.

Against priesthood:

And priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,  
And binding with briars my joys & desires.

Against the "moral law." He denies that man is born with any innate sense of morality—all moral codes are born of education—and thinks education a training in conformity. He is against all belief in sin; to him the tree in Eden is the gallows on which freedom-seeking

man is hanged by dead-souled priests. He savagely parodied a Dr. Thornton's new version of the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father Augustus Caesar, who art in these thy Substantial Astronomical Telescopic Heavens, Holiness to Thy Name or Title, & reverence to thy Shadow. . . . Give us day by day our Real Taxed Substantial Money bought bread, deliver from the Holy Ghost whatever cannot be taxed. . . .

He is against every conception of God as an omnipotent person, as a body, as a Lord who sets in train any lordship over man:

Thou art a Man, God is no more,  
Thine own humanity learn to adore.

He believes that all restraint in obedience to a moral code is against the spirit of life:

Abstinence sows sand all over  
The ruddy limbs & flaming hair,  
But Desire Gratified  
Plants fruits & beauty there.

Blake is against all theological casuistry that excuses pain and admits evil; against sanctimonious apologies for injustice and the attempt to buy bliss in another world with self-deprivation in this one. The altar is a place on which the serpent has vomited out its poison; the priest is a blind old man with shears in his hand, to cut the fleece off human sheep. Sex is life, and no one can be superior to it or honestly content with less than true gratification:

What is it men in women do require?  
The lineaments of Gratified Desire.  
What is it women in men do require?  
The lineaments of Gratified Desire.

Restraint, in fact, follows from the organized injustice and domination in society:

The harvest shall flourish in wintry weather  
When two virginities meet together:

The King & the Priest must be tied in a tether  
Before two virgins can meet together.

He is against all forms of human exploitation, and all rationalizations of it in human prejudice:

And all must love the human form,  
In heathen, turk, or jew;  
Where Mercy, Love, & Pity dwell  
There God is dwelling too.

Against war, especially holy ones; against armies, and in pity for soldiers; against the factory system, the labor of children, the evaluation of anything by money.

In "London," one of his simplest and greatest poems, Blake paints the modern city under the sign of man's slavery, the agony of children, the suffering Soldier and the Whore:

I wander thro' each charter'd street,  
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infants cry of fear,  
In every voice, in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry  
Every black'ning Church appalls;  
And the hapless Soldier's sigh  
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful Harlots curse  
Blasts the new-born Infants tear,  
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

"Charter'd" means "bound." In his first draft of this poem, Blake wrote "dirty Thames," but characteristically saw that he could realize more of the city's human slavery in describing the river as bound between its London shores. His own place in the poem is that of the walker in the modern inhuman city, one isolated man in the net which men have created. "I wander thro' each charter'd street." For him man is always the wanderer in the oppressive and sterile world of materialism which only his imagination and love can render human. In a more difficult poem, characteristic of his deeper symbolism, he speaks of the world of matter as

A Fathomless & boundless deep,  
There we wander, there we weep;

In "London," however, the wandering is not a symbolic expression. In the modern city man has lost his real being, as he has already lost his gift of vision in the "fathomless and boundless" deep of his material nature. Blake here describes one man, himself, in a city that is only too real, the only city he ever knew—yet the largest in the world, the center of empire. The city stands revealed in the cry of *every* Man, in *every* Infant's cry of fear. The wanderer in the chartered streets is concerned with a social picture and, in the face of so much suffering, with the social evil that some create and all permit. The extraordinary terseness of the poem stems from Blake's integral vision of the suffering of man and his alienation from institutions as one. His indignation gives him the power of movement; it also leads him into the repetitions which dominate the tonal order of the poem—the *every* cry of *every* Man, the Infant's *cry of fear*, till his tender vehemence swells into the generality of *in every voice, in every ban*.

*Every* is magic to Blake. Poetically he cannot go

wrong on it, for it carries such a kernel of glory to his mind, it points so immediately to his burning human solidarity, that in using it he knows himself carried along by what is deepest to him. The *mind-forg'd manacles*, as central to his thought as any phrase he ever used, follows with a triumphant sweep right after it, and for an obvious reason. For he is one with every voice, every ban, and can now make his judgment. On this fresh creative impulse he leaps ahead to what is so complex, but for him so natural, a yoking of images:

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry  
Every black'ning Church appalls;

The young Chimney-sweeper is always dear to Blake, especially when he is condemned to get the soot out of the churches—an impossible task. He is the symbol of the child who is lost. He works among the waste-dirt of the Church, itself black with dogma and punitive zeal, and his own suffering makes it even blacker. *Black'ning* is a verb of endless duration in present time for Blake. In his drawing to this poem, the Chimney-sweeper is shown in one corner struggling before a black flame. At the top of the page he stands in defiance before the blind and tottering old man, the fossilized Church, who seems to be pouring out fresh soot. The walls are the stone blocks of a prison. The whole page is marked, like the turn of the hand on a vehement signature, by a fierce black border. Pictorially and verbally we thus rise to a climax at the word *appalls*. The Church is not appalled by the Chimney-sweeper's cry; the cry of the child, out of the midst of the Church, makes the Church appalling. Blake's thrust is so swift and deep that he characteristically puts the whole burden of his protest, with its inner music, into four words. Every black and blackening Church is appalling, and in every way. The

tone of *palls* to his ear, carrying the image of death, the grief and shame that will not rest, clangs with reverberations.

The unhappiness of the Soldier is not that of a man bleeding before a palace of which he is the sentry. Blake means that the Soldier's desperation runs, like his own blood, in accusation down the walls of the ruling Palace. Blake's own mind ran in so many channels at once, his vision of human existence was so total, that it probably never occurred to him that *blood* would mean anything less to others than it did to him. "Runs in blood down palace walls" is what Blake sees instantaneously in his mind when he thinks of the passivity and suffering of the Soldier. Blake is too much abreast of the reality he sees to use similes; he cannot deliberate to compare something to another. And he is equally incapable of using a metaphor with self-conscious daring. He saw the blood running down the ruler's walls before thinking of blood as a "powerful" image. There is no careful audacity in him, the preparation for the humor of T. S. Eliot's

I am aware of the damp souls of housemaids  
Sprouting despondently at area gates.

Blake's poetic urge, it is clear, was not to startle, to tease the mind into fresh combinations, but to make tangible, out of the wealth of relationships he carried in his mind, some portion of it equal to his vision of the life of man. How swiftly and emphatically he turns, at the first line of the fourth stanza, to

But most thro' midnight streets I hear

*But most* stands for: what I have described thus far is not the full horror of London, my city; not anything like what I have to tell you! And he then gives back, in

eighteen words, the city in which young girls are forced into prostitution; in which their exile from respectable society, like the unhappiness of the Soldier, expresses itself in a physical threat to another. The Soldier accuses the Palace with his blood; the prostitute curses with infection the young husband who has been with her; the "plague" finally kills the new-born child. The carriage that went to the church for a marriage ends at the grave as a hearse. Nothing can equal the bite of "blights with plagues," the almost visible thrust of the infection. And thanks to Blake's happy feeling for capitals, which he used with a painter's eye to distinguish the height of his concepts, Marriage stands above the rest in the last sentence of the poem, and swiftly falls into a hearse.

These are some of the poem's details, but they are not the poem. For the poem is to be grasped only by the moral imagination, as a shuddering vision of the mind. The title is a city, as the city is the present human world on the threshold of the industrial revolution. We are to read from the title to the last word, from London to its inner death, in one movement of human sympathy and arousal. This, in its simplest sense, is the key to Blake's meaning of vision. Vision is his master-word, not mysticism or soul. For vision represents the total imagination of man made tangible and direct in works of art. And as the metric structure of the poem encloses, in each line-frame of sharply enclosed syllables, the sight of man entering fully into the city with all his being—*hearing* "the mind-forg'd manacles," the harlot's disease *blasting* "the new born infant's tear," so the whole poem carries us along, in a single page, while the border designs meanwhile extend the vision by another art.

Blake was artist and poet; he designed his poems to

form a single picture. Trained to engraving as a boy, he invented for himself a method of etching a hand-printed poem and an accompanying design on the same page. Only two of his works were ever printed—his first book, *Poetical Sketches*, most of which he wrote between the ages of twelve and twenty-one, and a long and declamatory celebration of the new world after '89 called *The French Revolution*. Neither of these works was ever published. *Poetical Sketches* was run off for him, with a patronizing and apologetic preface by a Reverend Mathew, who with his wife formed a provincial intellectual society that Blake burlesqued in *An Island In The Moon*. *The French Revolution* was printed by a bookseller, Joseph Johnson, who was the center of a radical circle in London that included Blake, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Thomas Paine. After England became embroiled with France and a reactionary witch-hunt set after radical intellectuals and sympathizers with the French Republic, Johnson became panicky and left the book in proof. Some of Blake's greatest poems—"The Everlasting Gospel," "Auguries of Innocence," the lyrics that follow *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*—were found in "The Rossetti Manuscript," which was bought by Dante Gabriel Rossetti for ten shillings from an attendant at the British Museum. Blake's most famous works, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, along with his Prophetic Books—*The Book of Thel*, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, *America*, *Europe*, *The Book of Urizen*, *Milton*, *Jerusalem*, etc.—were done entirely by his method of "illuminated printing." Blake said he got the inspiration for this technique from the spirit of his dead brother Robert, the only member of his family with whom he had common sympathies. This

may be true, but it is a pity that Blake had to say so, for it has given people the idea ever since that Blake's visions were of the kind limited to a séance.

Blake's general technique is now clear. He etched his poems and designs in relief, with acid on copper. He corroded with acid the unused portions of the plate—characteristically, this became a symbol in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* of the corrosion of dead matter by the visionary human imagination. Each print-page as it was taken off the press was colored by hand. Each copy of a work was planned in a different color scheme. There are probably no handmade books in the world more beautiful. The only models for Blake were, of course, the illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages. But Blake worked in an entirely different spirit. The medieval manuscripts, impressive as they are, remain pictorial and remote; they were created by copyists, ornamentalist and pious scribes who worked in a liturgical spirit. Blake's designs are the accessories of a single creative idea. His conception of the beautiful book, as Laurence Binyon said, was one of a complete unity, "in which the lettering, the decoration, the illustrations, the proportions of the page, the choice of paper, surpassed even the conceptions of the medieval scribes and miniaturists." Yet Blake was not aiming at a "beautiful book" for its own sake, or at the kind of isolated luxury product which we usually associate with book illustration by a master artist. To him all the arts were simultaneously necessary, in their highest creative use and inner proportion, to give us the ground essence of his vision and a stimulus to our own. What was most important to him was that he should get all his vision down, through all the arts open to him, in work done entirely in his own person.

Blake's search for unity began in his own hands, with

his sense of craft. The symbolic synthesis to be created by his imagination was an image of man pressing, with the full power of his aroused creativity, against the walls of natural appearances. Each page of "illuminated printing" for him was a little world, in which the structure of the poem, the designs on the border, the accompanying figures on the page, the tints of the color, the rhythm of the lettering, were joined together into the supreme metaphor.

The attempt to model some ideal unity in a single work is not unique in itself—it is the symbolic function of traditional religious art, and is to be found in the outer and inner architecture of the cathedrals, the structure of *The Divine Comedy*, and cruciformly printed poems of George Herbert. What is different in Blake is that he is not modeling after any symbols but his own. The symbols always have an inner relatedness that leads us from the outer world to the inner man. The symbols live in the ordered existence of his vision; the vision itself is entirely personal, in theme and in the logic that sustains it. What is before us, in one of his pages, has been created entirely by him in every sense, and the unimpeachable quality of his genius is shown in an order that is as great as his independence, and shows us how real both were. The characteristic of his genius is to lift his unexpected symbols for the inner world of the imagination into a world in which they stand apart from the natural world and defy it. When he designs illustrations to Gray's poems, the magnitude of his vision throws the lines he is illustrating off the page. But what impresses us in their magnitude is not their physical size, but the uncanny spiritual coherence which joins them together and gives them an effect of absolute force. Blake could never "illustrate" another man's work, even though it was pretty much the only way by which

he could earn a living. Even if he respected the other man's work, as he did Milton and Dante, he created new conceptions of their subject in his own designs. When he did his twenty-one engravings to the Book of Job, he reversed the pious maxims of the Bible story to show a man destroyed by his own materialism and self-righteousness. Fortunately, he did not set his Job designs against a page reproduced from the Bible; he selected passages, and wrote new ones, and put both into the scroll-work of his border designs. His vision of Job is entirely his own work, as the Job is indeed the greatest of his "Prophetic Books." Where the words were created by him, as in his poems, the love of the word to the design is only one revelation of man's will to wed the contraries—like the marriage of Heaven and Hell. Blake's conception of union and of the infiniteness of union has no physical status. For him infinity is in man's passions and his will to know; it is a state of being.

Yet what has been designed is bound, much as Blake disliked all limits. So he carried the force and delicacy of his longing for the infinite into the subtle inwardness of everything he drew. In *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, he designed his poems in such a way that the words on the line seem to grow like flowerheads out of a thicket. Each hand-printed letter of script, each vine trailing a border between the lines, each moving figure above, beside, and below the page mounts and unites to form some visible representation of the inner life of man—seen in phases of the outward nature. Yet Blake was not seeking to represent nature; he used it as a book of symbols. When he put down something "natural" and visible on his page—a bramble, a tree, a leaf, a figure moving mysteriously in its symbolic space—the effort seemed to dissolve his need to believe in its sepa-

rate existence. The acid of the designer's imagination burned away the materials on which it worked. What he represented, for purposes of spiritual vision and imagery, dissolved its own exterior naturalness for him. The natural forms—from the arch of the sky to the stolid heroic figures he liked to draw—became a mold that would *contain* his symbolic ideas of them. This is what makes his gift so beautiful on one level, and often so unreachable on another. He brought a representation of the world into every conception; but he never drew an object for its own sake. He wrote and drew, as he lived, from a fathomless inner window, in an effort to make what was deepest and most invisible capturable by the mind of man. Then he used the thing created—the poem, the picture, joined in their double vision—as a window in itself, through which to look to what was still beyond. "I look through the eye," he said, "not with it."

In short, Blake was not looking for God. He shared in the mystic's quest, but he was not going the same way. But we can see at the same time that he was not interested in natural phenomena, in the indestructible actuality of what is not in ourselves but equally real. Spinoza once said that the greatest good is the knowledge of the union which the mind has with the whole nature. That is an exalted statement, but we can recognize its meaning through the work of naturalists of genius like Darwin, Marx, and Freud. The creative function of naturalism has been to establish, with some exactness, a measure of objective knowledge—whether in the description of matter and energy, man's own life as a biological organism, his economic society, or the life urges which civilization has pushed into a world below consciousness. Naturalism is a great and tragic way of looking at life, for with every advance in man's consciousness and in his ability to ascertain, to predict, and to con-

trol, he loses that view of his supreme importance which is at the center of religious myth. Naturalism helps to postpone death, but never denies it; it cannot distort objective truth for the sake of personal assurance; it finds assurance in man's ability to know something of what lies outside him. There flows from its positive insights an advance in man's consciousness of his own power that is more fertile and resourceful than any anthropocentric myth can inspire. Naturalism declares limits, and discovers new worlds of actuality between them. It is tragic, for by showing that man's experience is limited it gives him a sense of his permanent and unremitting struggle in a world he did not make. But the struggle is the image of his true life in the world, and one he deepens by art, knowledge, and love. The quality of tragedy is not sadness but grave exhilaration; it defines the possible.

Blake is not a naturalist; he believes in apprehension, not in being; in certainty at the price of reality. He does not believe that anything is finally real except the imagination of man. He grasped one horn of the classic dilemma—"how do I know that anything is real, since I know of reality only through my own mind?"—and pronounced that the problem was settled. He refused to believe the evidence of his senses that the human mind—however it may qualify or misread reality—is bombarded by something outside itself. We are eternally subjective; but there are objects. Indeed, it would seem to follow from our very ability to correct ourselves that we do measure our knowledge by some source. Our backs in Plato's cave are to the fire; but we know that the shadows on the wall before us are shadows, and not the fire itself. Blake assumed that what is partial is in error, and that what is limited is non-existent. But the truth is that he was not trying to prove anything phil-

osophically at all; his greatness depends not on his conception of the world but on what he created through it. In defense of his own personality, and in defiance of his age, he imagined a world equal to his heart's desire. He refused to admit objective reality only because he was afraid man would have to share the creation.

It is here that Blake has perplexed his readers even more than he has delighted them. The reason lies in his refusal to concede a distance between what is real and what is ideal; in his desperate need to claim them as one. Blake is difficult not because he invented symbols of his own; he created his symbols to show that the existence of any natural object and the value man's mind places on it were one and the same. He was fighting the acceptance of reality in the light of science as much as he was fighting the suppression of human nature by ethical dogmas. He fought on two fronts, and shifted his arms from one to the other without letting us know—more exactly, he did not let himself know. He created for himself a personality, in life and in art, that was the image of the thing he sought.

Like all the great enlighteners of the eighteenth century, Blake is against the *ancien régime* in all its manifestations—autocracy, feudalism, superstition. Though he loathed the destructive reason of the Deists, he sometimes praised it in the fight against "holy mystery." He was fighting for free thought. Yet he is not only a confederate of Diderot and Voltaire, Jefferson and Tom Paine; he is a herald of the "heroic vitalism" of Nietzsche and D. H. Lawrence, of Dostoevsky's scorn for nineteenth-century utilitarianism and self-contentment. Where the Encyclopedists were concerned with the investigation, on "natural principles," of man's place in society and his order in the universe, Blake—

who hated the Church as much as Voltaire and was as republican as Jefferson—was concerned with the freedom of man from all restrictions—whether imposed by the morality of the Church or the narrowness of positivism. Like Nietzsche, he considered himself an enemy of Socrates and of the Platonic dualism that became a permanent basis of Christian thought. What Blake said in so many of his early poems Nietzsche was to say in his autobiography: "All history is the experimental refutation of the theory of the so-called moral order of the world." Zarathustra, dancing mysteriously to the bacchanal of Nietzsche's imagined self-fulfillment, is prefigured in Blake's Los, the crusading imagination with the hammer in his hand. And like Nietzsche, Blake writes in his masterpiece, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, with the playful daemonism of those who league themselves with the "Devil" because his opposite number restricts human rights:

The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it.

With it there is the stress on heroic energy, on the rights of the superior that cannot be claimed under what Nietzsche called the "slave-morality":

The eagle never lost so much time as when he submitted to learn of the crow.

Damn braces. Bless relaxes.

Improvement makes strait roads; but the crooked roads without Improvement are the roads of genius.

Destroy, Blake says, all that binds man to decayed institutions. But destroy as well man's obedience to moral precepts that hinder the full power of his creative

will to assert, to love and to build. Desire is never vicious in itself; it is only turned to vicious ends when driven out of its real channel. Restraint in the name of the moral code is alone evil, for it distorts man's real nature. It is a device of the rulers of this world to keep us chained. For life is holy. Energy is eternal delight. Jesus is dear to us not because he was divine, but because he was a rebel against false Law, and the friend of man's desire. He defied the Kings and Priests. He was against punishment. He was the herald of man's joy, not of his imaginary redemption. Joy is the only redemption and all suppression is a little death. Humility is an imposture born of cunning. Better wrath than pity. "The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction."

If he had been Antichrist, Creeping Jesus,  
He'd have done anything to please us:  
Gone sneaking into the Synagogues  
And not used the Elders & Priests like Dogs,  
But humble as a Lamb or an Ass,  
Obey himself to Caiaphas.  
God wants not man to humble himself.

. . . . .

For he acts with honest, triumphant Pride,  
And this is the cause that Jesus died.

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake writes: "Opposition is true friendship." His drive is always toward creative self-assertion, toward man as a free creator. In *A Song of Liberty*, his vision of the old world burning in the fires of the French Revolution leads him to cry: "Empire is No More!"

Let the Priests of the Raven of dawn no longer, in deadly black, with hoarse note curse the sons of joy. Nor his accepted brethren—whom, tyrant, he calls free—lay the bound or build the roof. Nor pale religious lechery call that virginity that wishes but acts not!

So far Blake is a libertarian, an eighteenth-century radical more vehement, daring and imaginative in his conception of freedom than others, but sharing in a revolutionary tradition. Where he becomes truly prophetic and difficult is in his rejection of materialism. He denounces the Priest, in his "deadly black"; but he warns us not to "lay the bound or build the roof" with our anti-clerical freedom. He sets his thought absolutely against rationalism, scepticism, and experimentalism. He is with the Deists so long as they attack supernaturalism—detestable to Blake not because it is disprovable by reason, but because it implies obedience. He is against the Deists so long as they seek to submit the imagination to reason. Rationalism is dangerous because it leaves man in doubt. When the time-serving Bishop Watson wrote, at the request of the English Tory government, an attack on Tom Paine's *The Age of Reason*, Blake scrawled vehement attacks on the Bishop all over the margin of his *Apology for the Bible*.

It appears to me Now that Tom Paine is a better Christian than the Bishop.

I have read this Book with attention & find that the Bishop has only hurt Paine's heel while Paine has broken his head. The Bishop has not answer'd one of Paine's grand objections.

But in one of his most famous poems, he denounced Voltaire and Rousseau as the arch-Deists seeking to destroy man's capacity for visionary wonder:

Mock on, mock on, Voltaire! Rousseau!  
Mock on, mock on: 'tis all in vain!  
You throw the sand against the wind,  
And the wind blows it back again.

The sand is the dead particles separated by reason from the true unity of the human vision. Man under the domination of reason is to Blake a creature who has lost his

integral nature and has become a dead fragment in himself. Separateness is death; doubt is the child of separateness; the portions which man separates by his reason, in the analysis of natural objects, or by thinking of himself as a natural object, are the mocking ghosts of his dead imagination.

This impassioned rejection of all that is analytical and self-limiting in modern thought is central to Blake. It underlies all his conceptions, is the psychological background of his life, and falls, sometimes with a dead absoluteness, between his revolutionary thought and the modern world. It is only when we have understood that doubt and uncertainty stand to Blake's mind as the prime danger of modern life that we can see the main drives of his work, of his personal "queerness," and what led him to the artistic wreckage and incoherence of the later Prophetic Books. Blake's whole pattern, as man and artist, is that of one for whom life is meaningless without an absolute belief. He is like the nihilist Verkhovensky, in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, who "when he was excited preferred to risk anything rather than to remain in uncertainty." Freud spoke out of what is deepest and most courageous in the modern tradition when he said that "Man must learn to bear a certain portion of uncertainty." That is a great injunction which it is hard to follow: much harder than the authoritarian faiths of our time, the secular, sadistic religions, the phony ecstasy with which a Hitler's self-mortification is lost in vision of eternal conquest. But Blake is very much a man of our time: one who speaks to us with prophetic insight of our nihilism and insensibility. He was so frightened by what he could already see of it that he found his security only in an absolute personal myth. It is a trait that has become universal politics in our own time. Insecurity has become so endemic, in a society

increasingly unresponsive to basic human needs, that men will apparently distort and destroy anything to find their way back to the mystical faith of the child in his parents, the medieval man in his God, and the Nordic in the pagan forest. Blake is peculiarly contemporary in his anxiety, his longing for a faith that will be absolute and yet insurgent, his fear of evidence that will destroy the fantasy of man as the *raison d'être* of the universe. He is as great as Dostoevsky in his understanding of our modern deficiencies; he is as self-deluding as Dostoevsky, who was so afraid of his own nihilism that he allied himself with all that was most obscurantist in Czarist Russia.

This does not make what is central in Blake's work any less prophetic and beautiful. He is not the enemy of society, any more than Dostoevsky was, or the D. H. Lawrence who succumbed to a silly literary Fascism. The very excesses of Blake's myth, like the golden quality in his best work, spring from his impassioned defense of human dignity. Far less than Blake have we solved the problem of restoring to modern man some basic assurance, of giving him a human role to play again. It is the mark of a genius like Blake, or Dostoevsky, or Lawrence, that what is purest and most consistent in his thought burns away his own suffering and fanaticism, while his art speaks to what is most deeply human in us. The distortions and flatulence of Blake's myth spring in part from the very abundance of his gifts—turned in on themselves, with the "fire seeking its own form," as he wrote in *The French Revolution*. Those who distrust reason are usually those who have not enough capacity for it to know why it is beautiful, and slander in advance what they are afraid will destroy their prestige. But there are also those, like Blake and Dostoevsky, who are supremely intelligent, and in whom the audacity and

loneliness of genius, not to say social frustration, have led to the distrust of all that will not lead to personal security. Blake had one of the greatest minds in the history of our culture; and more fear of the mind than we can easily believe. He was a genius who from childhood on felt in himself such absolute personal gifts that, anticipating the devaluation of them by a materialistic society, made sure that society's values did not exist for him. Yet one of his most distinguishable personal traits, weaving through his vehement self-assertion, is his need to defend himself against society.

This is not the view of many people who have written on Blake's life; but with the exception of writers like Alexander Gilchrist and Mona Wilson, who at least sought the basic facts about him, most of his biographers have had no understanding of him. The usual view is that he was a happy mystic, who sat like a gloriously content martyr before his work, eating bread and locusts with an idiotic smile on his face. Blake evidently did enjoy great happiness in many periods, for he was a man for whom life consisted in exploring his own gifts. But there is even more in Blake's total revelation of himself, a rage against society, a deeply ingrained personal misery, that underlies his creative exuberance and gives it a melancholy and over-assertive personal force. He defends himself in so many secret ways that when he speaks of himself, at abrupt moments, his utterances have the heart-breaking appeal of someone who cries out: "I am really different from what you know!" To a Reverend Trusler, for example, who complained after commissioning some drawings that inspiration had led Blake too far, he wrote:

I feel that a man may be happy in This World. And I know that This World is a World of Imagination & Vision. I see Every thing I paint in This world, but Every body

does not see alike. To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is far more beautiful than the Sun, & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing which stands in the way. Some see Nature all Ridicule & Deformity, and by these I shall not regulate my proportions; & some scarce see Nature at all. But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, so he sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers.

This is beautiful; as many of Blake's personal notes, in letters, marginalia, notebook jottings, and recorded conversation, are beautiful. But they are beautiful in the same way, just as most of *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem* is ugly in the same way—as a series of passionately eloquent self-assertions, so burning in their exaltation that they seem to spring out of deep gulfs of private misery and doubt. That last word is always Blake's enemy. Just as he believed that

He who doubts from what he sees  
Will ne'er Believe, do what you Please.  
If the Sun & Moon should doubt,  
They'd immediately Go out

so he felt the antagonism of the age to his vision to be such a burden that he exceeded what is normal in the human longing for certainty and made his kind of certainty the supreme test of a man. Reading a contemporary work on mental disorder, he suddenly scrawled in the margin:

Cowper came to me and said: "O that I were insane always. I will never rest. Can you not make me truly insane? I will never rest till I am so. O that in the bosom of God I was hid. You retain health and yet are as mad as any of us all—over us all—mad as a refuge from unbelief—from Bacon, Newton and Locke."

Blake never wrote anything more important to himself. If he was mad, it was as *a refuge from unbelief*, and thus with the satisfaction of being firmly placed in the sense of his own value. His terrible isolation spoke in the need to defend his identity; if madness was the cost of this, it at least placed him "over us all." And he was higher than his age and over most of those who lived in it—higher not in a fantasy of superiority, but in the imaginative subtlety and resolution of his gifts; his faith that

we are put on earth a little space,  
That we may learn to bear the beams of love.

Yet what is so marked in his history is his need to prove to himself that his genius could survive. For he was struggling with his own temperament in a time when society threatened his right to exist.

Blake's need of certainty, whatever its personal roots, is also one of the great tragedies of modern capitalist society; particularly of that loss of personal status that was the immediate fate of millions in the industrial England of the "dark satanic mills." Blake was only one of many Englishmen who felt himself being slowly ground to death, in a world of such brutal exploitation and amid such inhuman ugliness, that the fires of the new industrial furnaces and the cries of the child laborers are always in his work. His poems and designs are meant to afford us spiritual vision; a vision beyond the factory system, the hideous new cities, the degradation of children for the sake of profit, the petty crimes for which children could still be hanged. "England," a man said to me in London on V-E day, "has never recovered from its industrial revolution"; Blake was afraid it could not survive it; the human cost was already too great.

He never saw the North of Britain, but the gray squalor of the Clydebank, the great industrial maw of Manchester and Liverpool, the slums, the broken families are remembered even in the apocalyptic rant of *Jerusalem*, where

Scotland pours out his Sons to labour at the Furnaces;  
Wales gives his Daughters to the Loom.

The lovely poem at the head of *Milton*, beginning

And did those feet in ancient time  
Walk upon England's mountains green?

is so intense a vision of a world other than the real industrial England that it has long been a Socialist hymn of millions of its working people.

Blake was an artisan; an independent journeyman living entirely on the labor of his hands, dependent on patrons in a luxury trade that was being narrowed down to those who could please most quickly. He lived as near the bottom of the English social pyramid as was possible to someone not sucked into the factories. His London is the London of the small tradesmen, the barely respectable artisans and shopkeepers who were caught between the decline of handicrafts and the rise of mass industry. He had to live by hackwork for publishers, but was so independent in his designs that he was forced more and more to engrave after others. One of the reasons why he delighted to make his own books is that he enjoyed complete liberty as an artist-engraver; they certainly would not have been printed by a commercial publisher. But his own prints went largely unbought. The stray copies of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that now belong only to the wealthiest collectors were offered, often unsuccessfully, for a pittance. In 1809 he

held an exhibition of his pictures, featuring his design of the Canterbury Pilgrims, and offering with it "a descriptive catalogue" that is one of his most personal documents. The exhibition, held under the grudging hospitality of his brother James, was a complete failure.

To measure the full depth of Blake's alienation from his age is impossible. Like Tharmas in *The Four Zoas*, he felt himself "a famish'd Eagle, raging in the vast expanse." But it may help us to see his predicament when we realize that he was an impoverished engraver, without any real class to which he could belong; a libertarian without continuing faith in politics—"something else besides human life"; an unknown Romantic poet and artist who felt suffocated by the formalized tastes of the age; a visionary without religion; an engraver after artists he often despised; a poet whose works were unprocurable. Even in his own trade, engraving, he seemed outmoded in competition with sophisticated craftsmen, especially from the Continent, who advanced beyond Blake's stiff techniques. Blake learned to engrave in a rigid and rather lifeless tradition; all his early training was under the direction of a master, James Basire, who set him to copy Gothic monuments. What makes his art so unique is his ability to design, with great formal inventiveness, his own intellectual visions; technically he was an anachronism even in his own day. He never resolved the twin influences upon his work of Gothic and Michelangelo's heroic grandeur. His human figures are always distinguished by a somnambulistic quality: they are mechanical actors in the spell of a tyrannical stage director. Their look on the page is always one of watchful waiting; they are symbols of ideas and states of being. Blake satisfied his own conception of design, but he very rarely satisfied anyone else. Naturally he resented more successful fellow-artists; par-

ticularly in oil portrait, for which he had no skill and which symbolized to him the effort of society artists to paint with ingratiating "realism."

It is no wonder that Blake's writing so often sputters out into furious protest against a world that would give him neither a living nor a hearing. In his own mind he lived in "a city of assassinations." He was a man who could be easily cheated; when defrauded by a shrewd "art-publisher" of the day named Cromek, he took out his revenge, after Cromek had brazenly hinted that it was easy to take advantage of him, since he was "one living in the wilderness," by writing in his notebook:

A Petty Sneaking Knave I knew --  
O Mr. Cr(omek), how do ye do?

But his ability to hit back ended in his notebook. He hated Sir Joshua Reynolds—the ruling light of the Royal Academy from which engravers were excluded; the genial and obliging portraitist of the ruling aristocracy, the complacent Augustan mind counseling artists to follow the rules. But all he could do about it was to note his hatred of Reynolds and his intense opposition to the latter's theories in the margins of Sir Joshua's *Discourses*.

Having spent the Vigour of my Youth & Genius under the Oppression of Sr Joshua & his Gang of Cunning Hired Knaves Without Employment & as much as could possibly be without Bread, The Reader must Expect to read in all my remarks on these Books Nothing but Indignation & Resentment. While Sr Joshua was rolling in Riches . . . (he) & Gainsborough Blotted & Blurred one against the other & Divided all the English World between them. Fuseli, Indignant, almost hid himself. I am hid.

Henry Fuseli was a Swiss-born artist, famous in London, who liked Blake and was one of his few friends. He was successful, as Blake was not, and Blake seems to

have exaggerated Fuseli's artistic solidarity in his joy at having found a friend in his own craft. Fuseli once said that he found Blake "damned good to steal from."

The vehement marginalia that contain so many of Blake's deepest resentments—against Bacon, against Reynolds, against Bishop Watson and Wordsworth's "atheistic" love of nature—are an obvious symbol of his protest against society. Not being part of it, he put his dissent into the margins. What is not so obvious, however, is that much of his vehement struggle to assert his independence was based on his marriage. The dissenting and small tradesman's class into which Blake was born was one tributary of our Puritan culture; on Blake it imposed poverty made drearier by genteel conformity. Nietzsche, the lonely professor of Greek, became drunk on the vision of the all-conquering male, but the fantasy was his basic sex experience. Lawrence dreamed all his life of a sun-filled Mediterranean world, full of literary Indians and impossibly hospitable women, whose chief virtue was that they lacked the self-righteousness of Presbyterian miners and school-teachers in Nottingham. Blake in most accounts of his life is portrayed as the ideal husband, who taught his illiterate Catherine how to read, and even to see visions when he did. There is little doubt that he was the ideal husband; and apparently he could not stand it. Catherine Blake became the perfect anamuensis, to the man even more than to the artist. She even learned to write and draw so much in his style that her known contributions to his work would otherwise be indistinguishable from his own. She was the ideal wife of his artistic and intellectual alienation; she was the perfect helpmeet in his social and economic desperation. She starved with him, believed in him, and even saw visions for company. If visitors were shocked by the lack of soap in the Blake

household, she explained that "Mr. Blake's skin don't *dirt!*" If Blake became completely indifferent to the lack of funds, she would gently remind him of the state of things by putting an empty plate before him for dinner.

Catherine Blake was an ideal wife; her only fault, apparently, was that she was not a person in her own right. The fault was most assuredly not in her but in Blake's annihilating need of her. He made an adoring servant out of her, and then evidently found that he longed for a woman. All the stories we have of them add up to very little, and those who drew upon her and Blake's friends for reminiscences after his death felt such veneration and excitement before their recovery of a neglected genius that they prettied up his domestic life as much as possible. But we do know that he proposed to her at their first meeting when, complaining that a girl had spurned him, she said: "Then I pity you." "Do you truly pity me?" he asked, in pleasure. Whereupon he found that he loved her. Yeats, who helped to doctor up the truth about Blake's life as much as anyone, thought this a lovely story and that they lived happily ever after. Unfortunately, Blake's own writing shows that he was tormented by her jealousy and that he thought marriage was the devil.

It is not necessary to find malicious confirmation of this in the famous story that he wanted Mary Wollstonecraft to join his household for a *ménage à trois*. Mary Wollstonecraft was a noble and deeply intelligent woman, more than a century ahead of her time, who believed in women's rights and took them. She was a tragic and courageous woman, far more attractive than the complacent bluestockings of London highbrow society, and much more interesting than her husband, William Godwin, or their daughter Mary, who became

Shelley's second wife. She was the English type of the great Continental heroines of feminism, from George Sand to Alexandra Kollontai. But though Blake was a member of the same intellectual radical group, headed by Johnson the bookseller, it is not hard to imagine how incongruous she must have looked at his side—Blake, who was the imperial visionary of his meager household, but in the London world a curious and threadbare crank. A liaison between John Wesley and Isadora Duncan would not have been more strange—indeed, Wesley was a worldly and aristocratic figure; Blake was a lower middle-class drudge, more of a Wesleyan than Wesley himself. But he seems to have been of the type that makes history, partly because he is not very happy at home.

Blake's "immoralism" (a silly word made necessary by the fact that *moral* lies like a fallen giant across our discourse) is of two kinds: lyrical and poignant expressions of human longing, and a dark obsession in the "Prophetic Books" with sex as the battleground of human struggle and revolt. And however narrow and pitiful the experience from which his own search for fulfillment sprang, there is no doubt that in its psychological truth, its tenderness and passionate support of human dignity, Blake's writing is one of the great prophesies of the love that is possible between man and woman. He is not a writer of "erotica"—the honeyed crumbs of those who have no bread; he rages in his notebooks, but he is never sly. The very status of the dirty story in our society reveals a conception of sex as something one puts over on the conventions. It is the great betrayal of human sincerity. Blake's fight is against secrecy, unnatural restraint, the fear of life—the distortions in the personality that follow from deception and resignation to it. There is implicit in all his attacks on

the "moral code" an understanding that gratification is impossible without true union. In this, as in so much else of his thought, Blake painted not only the immediate consequences of a reactionary morality based on outward conformity—the anxieties, the subtle hostilities, the habit of lying. He also foresaw the danger that is exactly present in our modern eroticism, which has the same relation to the failure of love that totalitarian solutions have to the failure of society. When we compare Blake with an artist like D. H. Lawrence, or an oratorical rebel like Henry Miller, we can see how much the obsessiveness, the cringing over-emphasis on sex in the most advanced modern writing is due to the inability of these writers to treat sex naturally in the whole frame of the human organization. As the dirty story pays homage to puritanism, so our modern eroticism wearily proclaims that the part which has been dislodged from the whole shall now be the key to all experience. The limitations of eroticism have exactly the same character, in life and in art: it divorces sex from human culture. As medieval men despised the body for the sake of the spirit, and perhaps lost both, so we tend to forget that the body is above all a person. Every reaction in favor of some suppressed truth overshoots the mark. Hence, too, the dreary primitivism of so much advanced writing—as great a lie about our human nature as the genteel writing of the past.

Blake is not free of the characteristic modern obsessiveness; he was no more free than we are. But he always knows exactly what he is. His theme is always the defense of the integral human personality. His principal virtue is that he does not make a virtue of "frankness"; he is concerned with basic human desire, fear, longing, resentment; with the innermost movements of a human being in the world. He describes, in

his great song cycle, the gulf between Innocence and Experience; he feels an inexpressible solidarity with those who are forever in it. For he knows that innocence and experience are not the faces of youth and age, but "the two contrary states of the human soul." He writes as a man, not as an "immoralist." One of the reasons why he is so supreme among those who have written of childhood is that he sees it as the nucleus of the whole human story, rather than as a state that precedes adult "wisdom." If he is afraid for the child, he pities the adult. In experience there is always the longing for "un-organized innocence: an impossibility"; in innocence there is the poignant foretelling of experience, which is death without the return to confidence and vision. Blake is utterly without cynicism. He never makes the characteristic modern mistake of devaluating a prime experience; he never throws out love with the love-affair. We may not agree with him that desire is infinite; we can never be sufficiently grateful to him for insisting that it is never cheap.

Blake is serious about sex, as he is serious about the child; and for the same reason. For he knows that as sex is the buried part of our civilization, so the child is the buried part of the man. His faith in the creative richness of love has the same source as his feeling for the secret richness of childhood: his ability to see through the dead skin of adulthood. He would have understood very well that our "child-psychology" shows the same guardedness toward the child that modern love and marriage reveal between men and women. The same guardedness and the same fear: for we "handle" children from the same negative fears and out of the same lack of positive participation and sympathy. Blake would have seen in our pedagogic carefulness the effort of caution to do the work of the imagination. In his own

time, when children were regarded as miniature adults, or as slaves or pets to those who ruled by their maturity, he showed that a child is not an abbreviated version of the adult, but a different being. In our time he would have seen that the distance between a parent and a child is usually the distance between the parents as lovers. For him sex meant enjoyment framed in wonder: the full play of our life-striving beyond all the distortions inflicted by respectable society and cynical experience. By the same token childhood was also a lost world—calling to us from our buried life.

Piping down the valleys wild,  
Piping songs of pleasant glee,  
On a cloud I saw a child,  
And he laughing said to me:

"Pipe a song about a Lamb!"  
So I piped with merry cheer.  
"Piper, pipe that song again;"  
So I piped; he wept to hear.

Innocence is belief and experience is doubt. The tragedy of experience is that we become incapable of love. The tragedy of childhood is that we inflict our lovelessness upon it. Blake's thinking is always organic; it is always directed to the hidden fountains of our humanity. Having never lost the creative freshness of childhood, he challenged experience with it. Having, as I believe, no real love-affair of his own, he had it with childhood. In any event, he had no children of his own. He was a man who had to believe fully, at the highest pitch of being, to live at all; and he loved childhood because it was native in its certainty. Human sensibility was so precious to him that he was ready to discard all its natural trappings to preserve it. Blake never deals with history, with the process and its reality; his search

is only for the central and forgotten sources of human feeling, imagination, solidarity. To be certain of them, he conceived the world over again in the image of his desire. But it is like our desire, even if it is nothing like our real world. And our desire is always a portion of the reality we have, as it is always a shadow on the reality we have not. That is why Blake at his best is enchanting even in the smallest proportions—in fact, it is difficult to read him with the usual continuity, so much does he fill our minds at each step.

The central subject of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* is that of the child who is lost and found. In its symbolism, it is the great theme of all Blake's work—the "real man, the imagination," that has been lost and will be found again through human vision. In *Innocence*, the little boy loses his father in the night, and God the Father leads him back to his weeping mother. The child is lost to its guardians, for in Blake's mind the child's nature is beyond the parents' comprehension, and is alone in a world the parents cannot enter. The grief of the child is also the loneliness of the soul in its sudden prison of earth; he is protected by God the Father. In *Experience*, however, the little boy who demands of the priest the right to assert his own thoughts and desires is "burn'd in a holy place." The little girl who enjoys love, without shame or fear, is suddenly confronted with the earthly father whose "loving look, like the holy book," drives her into terror. One little girl is lost and yet found in *Experience*, however; for she enters lovingly into the world of the passions, where she lives in freedom from the "wolvish howl" and the "lions' growl."

Experience is the "contrary" of innocence, not its negation. Contraries are phases of the doubleness of all existence in the mind of man; they reflect the unalter-

able condition of the human struggle. As hell can be married to heaven, the body seen by the soul, so experience lifts innocence into a higher synthesis based on vision. But vision is impossible without truth to one's deepest feelings. A lie is "the negation of passion." Life is thought and creation; it is to be had only in its fullness, for the "want of thought" is death. To enter fully into life we must go through the flame of disbelief, kill the fiction that man's desire is lawless and evil. In Innocence

Mercy has a human heart, pity a human face

### In Experience

Cruelty has a Human Heart  
And jealousy a Human Face;  
Terror the Human Form Divine,  
And Secrecy the Human Dress.

The Human Dress is forged Iron,  
The Human Form a fiery Forge,  
The Human Face a Furnace seal'd,  
The Human Heart its hungry Gorge.

That is what experience is for: to bring us from God the Father to the God that man alone creates. Experience is not evil; it merely shows us the face of evil as a human face, so that we shall learn that the world is exactly what man makes it, and that its ultimate triumphs occur within his understanding.

In the world of Innocence the child speaks to the lamb and marvels in its soft and bright goodness, over which stands the Jesus who is himself a lamb. In Experience we stare into the fiery eyes of the Tyger and think ourselves lost in the "forests of the night." But the Tyger is the face of the creation, marvelous and ambiguous; he is not evil. When Blake cries, in the most moving single expression in his work,

When the stars threw down their spears,  
And water'd heaven with their tears,  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

he does not find the thought abhorrent. But he does not answer the question; he keeps it as one, where a religious man would answer it consolingly. Never is he more heretical than in this most famous of his poems, where he glories in the hammer and the fire out of which are struck the "deadly terrors" of the Tyger. Blake does not believe in a war between good and evil; he sees only the creative tension presented by the struggle of man to resolve the contraries. What has been created, by some unknown hand, is a fiery furnace into which our hands must go to seize the fire. "The Tyger" is a poem of triumphant human awareness; it is a hymn to pure being. And what gives it its power is Blake's ability to fuse two aspects of the same human drama: the movement with which a great thing is created, and the joy and wonderment with which we join ourselves to it. The opening and closing stanzas are the same, for as we begin with our wonder before the creation, so we can only end on it. It is the living eternal existence; the fire is, so long as we are. That is why Blake begins on the four great beats of "Tyger! Tyger!", which call the creation by a name and bring us in apprehension before it.

The poem is hammered together with alliterative strokes. *Frame* is there,

What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

because he wants *fearful* as well.

In what distant deeps or skies  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand dare seize the fire?

begins the questioning. Blake goes straight to the poles: we are in the presence of a creation that can be traced from distant deeps to skies. What sustains the verse in our ear is the long single tone in which are blended the related sounds of *burnt*, *fire*, *thine*, *eyes*. By natural association—from the burning fire to the topmost eyes of the Tyger—and through the swell of the line, these words also form a natural little scale of four notes—a scale that ends in the crash of the question-mark. Blake's mind is darting between the mysterious unseen *he*, the maker of the Tyger, and the fire in its eyes. The fire is central to his thought, so much so that it eclipses the maker as a person and turns him into the force and daring with which he creates. Blake does not write "He"; he is far more interested in the creation than in the creator. But so great is this creation that the creator grows mysterious and powerful in its light. What is so beautiful in the second stanza is the leap from the Tyger to the creator. Blake goes from the fire to the creator's wings. This is not because he has an image of a celestial being with great wings, but because the fire could be created only by someone lifted on topmost wings. Blake is as astounded by the creator as he is by the Tyger—and in the same way, for both are such revelations of absolute energy. The emphasis on the creator, in the last line of the second stanza, is thus on *dare*.

We are now in the midst of the creation—or rather, of the great *thing* being created. The hammering, twisting, laughing strokes with which the creator works are not more decisive than Blake's own verse hammer. As usual, he has leaped ahead of us, and begins on a new

question; a question that begins with *And* because it is like a man taking breath between hammer strokes:

And what shoulder, & what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

The creator's shoulder, with terrible force, twists the sinews to make the *Tyger's* heart. *Twists* is powerful enough; but there is joined to it in Blake's mind what is "crooked" and off the main path for the genius-creator. The shoulder twisting the heart together has turned the creator's back away from us, even as we imagine him at his work. The hammer strokes now go faster and faster; the creation is so swift and final with each blow that Blake's mind rushes after the fall of the hammer, the movements of the creating hands and feet, the beats of the new heart. The poem now moves to the rhythm of the great work. Yet the poet must know whose dread hands and feet, working together before the anvil, could create this. Where does the creator's body and tools end and the *Tyger* begin?

What the hammer? What the chain?  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

The chains ring in the sorcerer's workshop. The questions now dart from the heart to the brain with the same instantaneous force with which brain and heart are being made. But *where* is this being done? Where is the furnace in which the fire of consciousness is being poured out into the *Tyger's* brain? What, in space and time, could even hold the *Tyger* as it is being created? Blake never answers, for the wonder with which he asks them is the wonder with which he beholds the *Tyger*.

But he leaps ahead, in the last phrase of the third line and the whole fourth line after it, to create the image of so dread a power that it can grasp the terrors of the Tyger. It is the long courageous movement with which the clasp is made—a great hand moving into the furnace to bring the Tyger to us—that gives the creation its final awesomeness. Blake creates this by the length of his question. Between the dread grasp and the clasp that holds the terrors in its hand is the movement between the creation and our being witness to it. Technically the thing is done by leaving a distance, a moment's suspense, between the end of the third line on *grasp* and the hard closing of the stanza on *clasp*. The assonance of those two words, like bones rasping together, joins us to the thing. The terror is in our hands.

But when Blake asks,

When the stars threw down their spears  
And water'd heaven with their tears,  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

he has no answer—least of all the comforting religious explanation of the division between the Lamb and the Tyger. The stars throwing down their “spears” join in the generation. But did he smile his work to see? *Did he?* Blake's answer is to bring us right back to the Tyger. He has no moral, and he will not let us off with anything less than our return to the fact that the Tyger exists—a fact that includes all its ambiguity and all our wonder and fear before it. The poem ends on the upbeat of man's eternal question of the world: where is its moral order? Blake offers no answer; he asks his question with the “fearful symmetry” of the creation straight before us.

Blake does not let us off with any conventional religious consolation; *nor does he let the creator off*. Had he believed in God, the contraries which are presented to man's mind by experience would have been easy to explain. The Christian explains them by the Fall—by that "happy guilt," as Augustine put it, which left man with a sense of original sin which only religion can cleanse away. Blake is utterly opposed to this: man never fell, and there is no prime evil in him to redeem. For him the contraries exist not because God willed it so in his punishment of man's transgression—could a just God punish man for "following his energies" and for showing curiosity? They exist because man's gift of vision is blocked up in himself by materialism and rationalism. Every man, by the very nature of life, is engaged in a struggle, against the false materialism of the age, to find his way back to perfect human sight. Man is not a sinner—he is a weary traveler lost under the hill, a material "spectre" looking for his "spiritual emanation." He is looking for his human center. Man cannot help getting lost when he deludes himself that he is a natural body subject to a natural society, obeying the laws of a natural God.

Do what you will, this life's a fiction  
And is made up of contradiction.

But vision restores his human identity. With the aid of vision, and through the practice of art, man bursts through the contraries and weds them together by his own creativity.

Blake's Prophetic Books are his attempt to explain how the contraries arose. They are his Greek mythology, his Genesis, his Book of Revelations. Blake is not Diderot or Stendhal; he does not take man as he finds him.

He is a Bible-haunted English dissenter who has taken on himself the burden of proving that man is an independent spiritual being. This required the refutation of all existing literature. The tortured rhetoric of the Prophetic Books is not a lapse from taste; it is the awful wilderness into which Blake had to enter by the nature of his staggering task. This was to give man a new Bible, and with it a new natural history; a new cosmogony, and with it his own version, supplanting Hebrew and Greek literature, of man's first self-consciousness in the universe. But this is not all he tried to do in the Prophetic Books. No one in his time, after all, could escape the influence of realism. To Blake the myth-maker the age required a new Bible. As a contemporary he could hardly escape the inspiration of neo-classical drama, of the historical chronicle, and even of the psychological novel. His Prophetic Books are in fact an attempt to create, on the basis of a private myth, a new epic literature that would ride the currents of the age. His chief model was *Paradise Lost*, and *Milton*, he tells us, was written because Milton came back to earth and begged him to refute the errors of his own epic. But Blake had an eye on Greek tragedy as well, and the Book of Job, and *The Divine Comedy*.

Blake was not a "naïf," a "wild man" piecing his philosophy together from "odds and ends" around the house. He was a very learned man who felt challenged and uneasy by what he had learned. One of the reasons why he labored so hard to create a new literature equal to his own vision is that he could never free himself of the models others had created. When we look at his first poems in *Poetical Sketches*, we can see solemn imitations of Shakespeare, Ossian, Gray, and Spenser; his first beautiful songs move slowly away from neo-classic form. His tracts, *There Is No Natural Religion* and *All*

*Religions Are One*, imitate the geometrical order of philosophic propositions that was the carry-over from mathematics to natural philosophy. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is a parody of sources to which Blake was deeply indebted for his form: Genesis, the Proverbs, the Apocalypse, and Swedenborg. The Prophetic Books are an attempt to create a new classical literature, after all the sources. Nothing shows so clearly the tremendous inner conflicts in Blake as the ghosts of other men's books in his own. It is impossible, for anyone who has studied the Prophetic Books carefully, to see him as an enraptured scribe singing above the clouds. His visions in these books were an attempt to force down his own uneasiness. He could find his peace only by creating an epic world so singularly his own that it would supplant every other. He never succeeded. His task was beyond all human strength and all art. He created myths endlessly and represented them as human beings in endlessly energetic and turgid postures of struggle, oppression, and liberation. *But he never gave up the myth.* The "mad" Blake, whose wildest sayings furnish so much biographical chit-chat about him, was the man who still believed the myth long after suffering and alienation had dulled in his mind the objects it represented. Without the myth he would have been entirely lost, intolerably isolated. So he went even further—John Milton believed in it, too; and—the significant last chapter of Blake's thought—Jesus was above all a Blakean.

The last Prophetic Books are a jungle, but it is possible—if you have nothing else to do—to get through them. What Joyce said so lightly Blake would have repeated with absolute assurance—he demanded nothing less of his readers than that they should devote their lives to the elucidation of his works. Yet there are whole

areas of the first Prophetic Books that represent Blake's art and thought at their purest; the illuminated designs, even to a fantastic jumble like *Jerusalem*, are overwhelming in their beauty and power. To labor over works like *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem* for the sake of intellectual exegesis is against the whole spirit of art. Where Blake does not write poetry, he orates; and when he orates it is "the will trying to do the work of the imagination." Yet his rhetorical resources were so overwhelming that they flow like hot lava over the stereotypes of the myth. He obviously felt so little the consecutiveness of his "argument" that in at least one copy of *Jerusalem* he allowed misplaced pages to remain where they were. His concern is not with the coherence of his theme, but with his need to get everything in. Even within the assumed order of the myth the characters lose their symbolic references when they do not transfer them among each other. They came to represent so much of Blake's private life as well as his public vision that he interrupted himself at regular intervals to preach against jealousy and the domination of man by woman.

Blake was never jarred by the tumult of all the conflicts he revealed in his Prophetic Books. His loneliness as a man and thinker was so overwhelming that he took his gifts as the measure of human insight. He was a lyric poet of genius and a very bad dramatic poet; but he suffered from the illusion that his poetic gift was also a dramatic and representational one. The gift of creating character is inseparable from an interest in history. Just as the novel owes its principal development to the modern consciousness that society is man-made, so the ability to create character is impossible without an understanding of men in relation to other men; in short, of man as a creature of process and conflict. Blake's

characters are names attached arbitrarily to absolute human faculties and states of being. The name of the character may have a punning or derived relation to the faculty he represents, as Urizen is the god of this world and its sterility who is "your reason," or Orc, Blake's first hero, came into his mind from Norse mythology. So Albion is the central figure of man, "the eternal man," and Enitharmon is the "universal" woman. But when Blake sets them to orating against each other, their nominal identity is only the line which he must desperately hold on to to bring up the deep-sea fish of human passions, errors, lamentations. The figure of Urizen is an oppressor; Orc is the spirit of visionary emancipation; Los, who comes in later, is the spirit of time working to rejoin man to his lost unity, and the "Eternal Prophet." Through them, and many other characters, Blake is seeking to explain how man lost the gift of vision. Urizen is the false God, the Satan who separated himself from the prime unity and set in motion the divisions in man, the search after the analytical and the inhuman.

Blake is not interested in character. His figures are the human faculties at war with each other. He is trying to explain, in the form of a new Genesis, how the split in man occurred, and to show the necessary present struggle of man to unify himself back to an integral and imaginative human nature. He is also raging against all those who would hold him in—from the analytical God of Newton to the scepticism of Voltaire, from the successful painters of the day to "the shadowy female," who torments man by jealousy. But since he has no interest in history, the beginning, the present, and the future dissolve into each other. What was begun in error is suffered through error now. He is fighting his own sorrows even as he is trying to impose the massive struc-

ture of his hazardously built myth onto the contemporary world: to bring himself to us, and the England he actually lived in. Hence the bewildering jump from Old Testament names to English streets, cities, and counties, in which Blake's own cries were never heard:

O dreadful Loom of death! O piteous Female forms, compell'd  
To weave the Woof of Death! On Camberwell Tirzah's courts,  
Malah's on Blackheath; Rahab & Noah dwell on Windsor's heights,  
Where once the Cherubs of Jerusalem spread to Lambeth's Vale.  
Milcah's Pillars shine from Harrow to Hampstead, where Hoglah  
On Highgate's heights magnificent Weaves over trembling Thames  
To Shooter's Hill and thence to Blackheath, the dark Woof.  
Loud,  
Loud roll the Weights & Spindles over the whole Earth, let down  
On all sides round to the Four Quarters of the World, eastward on  
Europe to Euphrates & Hindu, to Nile & back in Clouds  
Of Death across the Atlantic to America North & South.  
Hence, too, the poetic atrocities:

In torrents of mud settling thick  
With Eggs of unnatural production

Which is dreadful, but only a paraphrase of the noble rant which deafens and dulls us all through the later books:

But in the Optic vegetative Nerves Sleep was transformed  
To Death in old time by Satan, the father of Sin & Death:  
And Satan is the Spectre of Orc, & Orc is the generate Luvah.

Blake cannot get away from the materialist trappings, the naturalistic "spectre"; no one can, and his collapse

as an artist in the later Prophetic Books is due to his effort to *dispel* the natural forms by a mythological explanation of them. He created his myth to contain his defiance, as it were; when he found it insufficient, he let it supplant life itself. On the subject of God, he even borrowed a thought from the Gnostic heresy, as he was indebted to the Jewish Cabala for his vision of the man who anciently contained all things of heaven and earth in himself. The Gnostic heresy is one the Catholic Church understandably rooted out in furious alarm—for it held that the world was dominated by Satan. It is not hard to understand how comforting this thought must have been to Blake. If this world is a mere deception, and all its natural appearances a masquerade through which man must look for spiritual vision, it is because the “real” God has been supplanted by Satan. So all spiritual vision leads us back to the “real” God, who is now Jesus. Blake’s Jesus is the defiant iconoclast, the friend of artists and revolutionaries. When one reads *Jerusalem*, one thinks of Nietzsche, who when he went mad signed himself “The Crucified One,” and of that old cry from the defeated—“Thou has conquered, O Galilean!”

Blake does not “yield” to Jesus; he creates Jesus in his own image.

The Son, O how unlike the Father! First God Almighty comes with a Thump on the head. Then Jesus Christ comes with a balm to heal it.

But not before he has shown us the inner thread in his snarled Prophetic Books—which is the lament against his own “selfhood” and the appeal against the Accuser, “who is the God of this World.” It is impossible to read Blake’s vehement and repeated cries against the “Accuser” without being moved by the tremendous burden

of guilt he carried despite his revolt and independence. The "Accuser" is Satan, who rules this world, which is "the Empire of nothing." It is he who tormented man with a sense of sin; who made men and women look upon their own human nature as evil; who plunged us into the cardinal human heresy, which is the heresy against man's own right and capacity to live. The "Accuser" is the age in which Blake lived and it is the false god whose spectre mocks our thirst for life. It is the spirit, to Blake, of all that limits man, shames man, and drives him in fear. The Accuser is the spirit of the machine, which leads man himself into "machination." He is jealousy, unbelief, and cynicism. But his dominion is only in you; and he is only a specter.

The Accuser is the prime enemy, yet he is a fiction; he need not exist. But Blake fought him so bitterly that he acknowledged how great a price he had paid for his own audacity. What was it that made him long at the end, above everything else, for "forgiveness?" What was it he had to be "forgiven" for?

And now let me finish with assuring you that, Tho' I have been very unhappy, I am so no longer. I am again Emerged into the light of day; I still & shall to Eternity Embrace Christianity and Adore him who is the Express image of God; but I have travel'd thro' Perils & Darkness not unlike a Champion. I have Conquer'd, and shall go on Conquering. Nothing can withstand the fury of my course among the Stars of God & in the Abysses of the Accuser. My enthusiasm is still what it was, only Enlarged and confirmed.



We do not know—his only name for his "guilt" remains "selfhood"—that is, the full force of his individual claim to self-assertion. Blake was a prophet who was not delivered by his own prophecy. But if he succumbed at all to the "Accuser," he did more than anyone else to

expose him. If he failed at the complete harmony to which all his own thought is directed, it is because man, though he is a little world in himself, is little indeed when measured against the whole of a creation that was not made for him alone—or for him to know everlasting certainty in it. Blake's tragedy was the human tragedy, made more difficult because his own fierce will to a better life prevented him from accepting any part of it. Laboring after the infinite, he felt himself shadowed by the Accuser. That is the personal cost he paid for his vision, as it helps us to understand his need of a myth that would do away with tragedy. But as there is something deeper than tragedy in Blake's life, so at the heart of his work there is always the call to us to recover our lost sight. Blake was a man who had all the contraries of human existence in his hands, and he never forgot that it is the function of man to resolve them.

Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have curbed & govern'd their Passions, or have no Passions, but because they have cultivated their Understandings.

ALFRED KAZIN





THE PORTABLE

WILLIAM BLAKE







## PROSPECTUS

*October 10, 1793.*

### TO THE PUBLIC

The Labours of the Artist, the Poet, the Musician, have been proverbially attended by poverty and obscurity; this was never the fault of the Public, but was owing to a neglect of means to propagate such works as have wholly absorbed the Man of Genius. Even Milton and Shakespeare could not publish their own works.

This difficulty has been obviated by the Author of the following productions now presented to the Public; who has invented a method of Printing both Letter-Press and Engraving in a style more ornamental, uniform, and grand, than any before discovered, while it produces works at less than one fourth of the expense.

If a method of Printing which combines the Painter and the Poet is a phenomenon worthy of public attention, provided that it exceeds in elegance all former methods, the Author is sure of his reward.

Mr. Blake's powers of invention very early engaged the attention of many persons of eminence and fortune; by whose means he has been regularly enabled to bring before the Public works (he is not afraid to say) of equal magnitude and consequence with the productions of any age or country: among which are two large highly finished engravings (and two more are nearly ready) which will commence a Series of subjects from the Bible, and another from the History of England.

The following are the Subjects of the several Works now published and on Sale at Mr. Blake's, No. 13, Hercules Buildings, Lambeth.

1. Job, a Historical Engraving. Size 1 ft. 7½ in. by 1 ft. 2 in.: price 12s.
2. Edward and Elinor, a Historical Engraving. Size 1 ft. 6½ in. by 1 ft.: price 10s. 6*d*.
3. America, a Prophecy, in Illuminated Printing. Folio, with 18 designs: price 10s. 6*d*.
4. Visions of the Daughters of Albion, in Illuminated Printing. Folio, with 8 designs, price 7s. 6*d*.
5. The Book of Thel, a Poem in Illuminated Printing. Quarto, with 6 designs, price 3s.
6. The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, in Illuminated Printing. Quarto, with 14 designs, price 7s. 6*d*.
7. Songs of Innocence, in Illuminated Printing. Octavo, with 25 designs, price 5s.
8. Songs of Experience, in Illuminated Printing. Octavo, with 25 designs, price 5s.
9. The History of England, a small book of Engravings. Price 3s.
10. The Gates of Paradise, a small book of Engravings. Price 3s.

The Illuminated Books are Printed in Colours, and on the most beautiful wove paper that could be procured.

No Subscriptions for the numerous great works now in hand are asked, for none are wanted; but the Author will produce his works, and offer them to sale at a fair price.



*I.*

THE YOUNG BLAKE







## *From* POETICAL SKETCHES

(1783)

### TO THE MUSES

Whether on Ida's shady brow,  
Or in the chambers of the East,  
The chambers of the sun, that now  
From antient melody have ceas'd;

Whether in Heav'n ye wander fair,  
Or the green corners of the earth,  
Or the blue regions of the air,  
Where the melodious winds have birth;

Whether on chrystal rocks ye rove,  
Beneath the bosom of the sea  
Wand'ring in many a coral grove,  
Fair Nine, forsaking Poetry!

How have you left the antient love  
That bards of old enjoy'd in you!  
The languid strings do scarcely move!  
The sound is forc'd, the notes are few!

### TO THE EVENING STAR

Thou fair-hair'd angel of the evening,  
Now, whilst the sun rests on the mountains, light

Thy bright torch of love; thy radiant crown  
Put on, and smile upon our evening bed!  
Smile on our loves, and, while thou drawest the  
Blue curtains of the sky, scatter thy silver dew

On every flower that shuts its sweet eyes  
In timely sleep. Let thy west wind sleep on  
The lake; speak silence with thy glimmering eyes,  
And wash the dusk with silver. Soon, full soon,  
Dost thou withdraw; then the wolf rages wide,  
And the lion glares thro' the dun forest:  
The fleeces of our flocks are cover'd with  
Thy sacred dew: protect them with thine influence.

#### TO MORNING

O holy virgin! clad in purest white,  
Unlock heav'n's golden gates, and issue forth;  
Awake the dawn that sleeps in heaven; let light  
Rise from the chambers of the east, and bring  
The honied dew that cometh on waking day.  
O radiant morning, salute the sun,  
Rous'd like a huntsman to the chace, and, with  
Thy buskin'd feet, appear upon our hills.

#### SONG

How sweet I roam'd from field to field,  
And tasted all the summer's pride,  
'Till I the prince of love beheld,  
Who in the sunny beams did glide!

He shew'd me lilies for my hair,  
And blushing roses for my brow;  
He led me through his gardens fair,  
Where all his golden pleasures grow.

With sweet May dews my wings were wet,  
And Phœbus fir'd by vocal rage;  
He caught me in his silken net,  
And shut me in his golden cage.

He loves to sit and hear me sing,  
Then, laughing, sports and plays with me;  
Then stretches out my golden wing,  
And mocks my loss of liberty.

## SONG

My silks and fine array,  
My smiles and languish'd air,  
By love are driv'n away;  
And mournful lean Despair  
Brings me yew to deck my grave:  
Such end true lovers have.

His face is fair as heav'n,  
When springing buds unfold;  
O why to him was't giv'n,  
Whose heart is wintry cold?  
His breast is love's all worship'd tomb,  
Where all love's pilgrims come.

Bring me an axe and spade,  
Bring me a winding sheet;

## THE YOUNG BLAKE

I'll pore upon the stream,  
Where sighing lovers dream,  
And fish for fancies as they pass  
Within the watery glass.

I'll drink of the clear stream,  
And hear the linnet's song;  
And there I'll lie and dream  
The day along:  
And, when night comes, I'll go  
To places fit for woe,  
Walking along the darken'd valley  
With silent Melancholy.

## MAD SONG

The wild winds weep,  
And the night is a-cold;  
Come hither, Sleep,  
And my griefs unfold:  
But lo! the morning peeps  
Over the eastern steeps,  
And the rustling birds of dawn  
The earth do scorn.

Lo! to the vault  
Of paved heaven,  
With sorrow fraught  
My notes are driven:  
They strike the ear of night,  
Make weep the eyes of day;  
They make mad the roaring winds,  
And with tempests play.

Like a fiend in a cloud,  
With howling woe,  
After night I do croud,  
And with night will go;  
I turn my back to the east,  
From whence comforts have increas'd;  
For light doth seize my brain  
With frantic pain.

## SONG

Fresh from the dewy hill, the merry year  
Smiles on my head, and mounts his flaming car;  
Round my young brows the laurel wreathes a shade,  
And rising glories beam around my head.

My feet are wing'd, while o'er the dewy lawn  
I meet my maiden, risen like the morn:  
Oh bless those holy feet, like angels' feet;  
Oh bless those limbs, beaming with heav'nly light!

Like as an angel glitt'ring in the sky  
In times of innocence and holy joy;  
The joyful shepherd stops his grateful song  
To hear the music of an angel's tongue.

So when she speaks, the voice of Heaven I hear:  
So when we walk, nothing impure comes near;  
Each field seems Eden, and each calm retreat;  
Each village seems the haunt of holy feet.

But that sweet village, where my black-ey'd maid  
Closes her eyes in sleep beneath night's shade,

Whene'er I enter, more than mortal fire  
Burns in my soul, and does my song inspire.

## SONG

When early morn walks forth in sober grey,  
Then to my black ey'd maid I haste away;  
When evening sits beneath her dusky bow'r,  
And gently sighs away the silent hour,  
The village bell alarms, away I go,  
And the vale darkens at my pensive woe.

To that sweet village, where my black ey'd maid  
Doth drop a tear beneath the silent shade,  
I turn my eyes; and, pensive as I go,  
Curse my black stars, and bless my pleasing woe.

Oft when the summer sleeps among the trees,  
Whisp'ring faint murmurs to the scanty breeze,  
I walk the village round; if at her side  
A youth doth walk in stolen joy and pride,  
I curse my stars in bitter grief and woe,  
That made my love so high, and me so low.

O should she e'er prove false, his limbs I'd tear,  
And throw all pity on the burning air;  
I'd curse bright fortune for my mixed lot,  
And then I'd die in peace, and be forgot.

## TO SPRING

O thou with dewy locks, who lookest down  
Thro' the clear windows of the morning, turn

Thine angel eyes upon our western isle,  
Which in full choir hails thy approach, O Spring!

The hills tell each other, and the list'ning  
Vallies hear; all our longing eyes are turned  
Up to thy bright pavillions: issue forth,  
And let thy holy feet visit our clime.

Come o'er the eastern hills, and let our winds  
Kiss thy perfumed garments; let us taste  
Thy morn and evening breath; scatter thy pearls  
Upon our love-sick land that mourns for thee.

O deck her forth with thy fair fingers; pour  
Thy soft kisses on her bosom; and put  
Thy golden crown upon her languish'd head,  
Whose modest tresses were bound up for thee!

#### TO SUMMER

O thou, who passest thro' our vallies in  
Thy strength, curb thy fierce steeds, allay the heat  
That flames from their large nostrils! thou, O Summer,  
Oft pitched'st here thy golden tent, and oft  
Beneath our oaks hast slept, while we beheld  
With joy thy ruddy limbs and flourishing hair.

Beneath our thickest shades we oft have heard  
Thy voice, when noon upon his fervid car  
Rode o'er the deep of heaven; beside our spring  
Sit down, and in our mossy vallies, on  
Some bank beside a river clear, throw thy  
Silk draperies off, and rush into the stream:  
Our vallies love the Summer in his pride.

## THE YOUNG BLAKE

Our bards are fam'd who strike the silver wire:  
Our youth are bolder than the southern swains:  
Our maidens fairer in the sprightly dance:  
We lack not songs, nor instruments of joy,  
Nor echoes sweet, nor waters clear as heaven,  
Nor laurel wreaths against the sultry heat.

## TO AUTUMN

O Autumn, laden with fruit, and stained  
With the blood of the grape, pass not, but sit  
Beneath my shady roof; there thou may'st rest,  
And tune thy jolly voice to my fresh pipe;  
And all the daughters of the year shall dance!  
Sing now the lusty song of fruits and flowers.

"The narrow bud opens her beauties to  
The sun, and love runs in her thrilling veins;  
Blossoms hang round the brows of morning, and  
Flourish down the bright cheek of modest eve,  
Till clust'ring Summer breaks forth into singing,  
And feather'd clouds strew flowers round her head.

The spirits of the air live on the smells  
Of fruit; and joy, with pinions light, roves round  
The gardens, or sits singing in the trees."  
Thus sang the jolly Autumn as he sat;  
Then rose, girded himself, and o'er the bleak  
Hills fled from our sight; but left his golden load.

## TO WINTER

O Winter! bar thine adamantine doors:  
The north is thine; there hast thou built thy dark

Deep-founded habitation. Shake not thy roofs,  
Nor bend thy pillars with thine iron car.

He hears me not, but o'er the yawning deep  
Rides heavy; his storms are unchain'd, sheathed  
In ribbed steel; I dare not lift mine eyes,  
For he hath rear'd his sceptre o'er the world.

Lo! now the direful monster, whose skin clings  
To his strong bones, strides o'er the groaning rocks:  
He withers all in silence, and his hand  
Unclothes the earth, and freezes up frail life.

He takes his seat upon the cliffs; the mariner  
Cries in vain. Poor little wretch! that deal'st  
With storms, till heaven smiles, and the monster  
Is driv'n yelling to his caves beneath mount Hecla.



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## II.

THERE IS  
NO NATURAL RELIGION  
*and*  
ALL RELIGIONS  
ARE ONE





# THERE IS NO NATURAL RELIGION

## FIRST SERIES

(1788)

The *Argument*. Man has no notion of moral fitness but from Education. Naturally he is only a natural organ subject to Sense.

i. Man cannot naturally Perceive but through his natural or bodily organs.

ii. Man by his reasoning power can only compare & judge of what he has already perciev'd.

iii. From a perception of only 3 senses or 3 elements none cōuld deduce a fourth or fifth.

iv. None could have other than natural or organic thoughts if he had none but organic perceptions.

v. Man's desires are limited by his perceptions, none can desire what he has not perciev'd.

vi. The desires & perceptions of man, untaught by any thing but organs of sense, must be limited to objects of sense.

*Conclusion*. If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things, & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again.

## SECOND SERIES

(1788)

i. Man's perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception; he perceives more than sense (tho' ever so acute) can discover.

ii. Reason, or the ratio of all we have already known, is not the same that it shall be when we know more.

iii. [*This proposition has been lost.*]

iv. The bounded is loathed by its possessor. The same dull round, even of a universe, would soon become a mill with complicated wheels.

v. If the many become the same as the few when possess'd, More! More! is the cry of a mistaken soul; less than All cannot satisfy Man.

vi. If any could desire what he is incapable of possessing, despair must be his eternal lot.

vii. The desire of Man being Infinite, the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite.

*Application.* He who sees the Infinite in all things, sees God. He who sees the Ratio only, sees himself only.

Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is.



## ALL RELIGIONS ARE ONE

(1788)

The Voice of one crying in the Wilderness

*The Argument.* As the true method of knowledge is experiment, the true faculty of knowing must be the faculty which experiences. This faculty I treat of.

PRINCIPLE 1st. That the Poetic Genius is the true Man, and that the body or outward form of Man is derived from the Poetic Genius. Likewise that the forms of all things are derived from their Genius, which by the Ancients was call'd an Angel & Spirit & Demon.

PRINCIPLE 2d. As all men are alike in outward form, So (and with the same infinite variety) all are alike in the Poetic Genius.

PRINCIPLE 3d. No man can think, write, or speak from his heart, but he must intend truth. Thus all sects of Philosophy are from the Poetic Genius adapted to the weaknesses of every individual.

PRINCIPLE 4th. As none by traveling over known lands can find out the unknown, So from already acquired knowledge Man could not acquire more: therefore an universal Poetic Genius exists.

PRINCIPLE 5th. The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nation's different reception of the Po-

etic Genius, which is every where call'd the Spirit of Prophecy.

PRINCIPLE 6th. The Jewish & Christian Testaments are An original derivation from the Poetic Genius; this is necessary from the confined nature of bodily sensation.

PRINCIPLE 7th. As all men are alike (tho' infinitely various), So all Religions &, as all similars, have one source.



The true Man is the source, he being the Poetic Genius.



*III.*

SONGS  
OF INNOCENCE  
AND  
OF EXPERIENCE

SHEWING THE TWO CONTRARY  
STATES OF THE HUMAN SOUL







# SONGS OF INNOCENCE

(1788-1794)

## INTRODUCTION

Piping down the valleys wild,  
Piping songs of pleasant glee,  
On a cloud I saw a child,  
And he laughing said to me:

“Pipe a song about a Lamb!”  
So I piped with merry chear.  
“Piper, pipe that song again;”  
So I piped: he wept to hear.

“Drop thy pipe, thy happy pipe;  
Sing thy songs of happy chear:”  
So I sung the same again,  
While he wept with joy to hear.

“Piper, sit thee down and write  
In a book, that all may read.”  
So he vanish’d from my sight,  
And I pluck’d a hollow reed,

And I made a rural pen,  
And I stain’d the water clear,  
And I wrote my happy songs  
Every child may joy to hear.

## THE SHEPHERD

How sweet is the Shepherd's sweet lot!  
 From the morn to the evening he strays;  
 He shall follow his sheep all the day,  
 And his tongue shall be filled with praise.

For he hears the lamb's innocent call,  
 And he hears the ewe's tender reply;  
 He is watchful while they are in peace,  
 For they know when their Shepherd is nigh.

## THE ECCHOING GREEN

The Sun does arise,  
 And make happy the skies;  
 The merry bells ring  
 To welcome the Spring;  
 The skylark and thrush,  
 The birds of the bush,  
 Sing louder around  
 To the bells' chearful sound,  
 While our sports shall be seen  
 On the Ecchoing Green.

Old John, with white hair,  
 Does laugh away care,  
 Sitting under the oak,  
 Among the old folk.  
 They laugh at our play;  
 And soon they all say:  
 "Such, such were the joys

When we all, girls & boys,  
In our youth time were seen  
On the Ecchoing Green."

Till the little ones, weary,  
No more can be merry;  
The sun does descend,  
And our sports have an end.  
Round the laps of their mothers  
Many sisters and brothers,  
Like birds in their nest,  
Are ready for rest,  
And sport no more seen  
On the darkening Green.

## THE LAMB

Little Lamb, who made thee?  
Dost thou know who made thee?  
Gave thee life, & bid thee feed  
By the stream & o'er the mead;  
Gave thee clothing of delight,  
Softest clothing, wooly, bright;  
Gave thee such a tender voice,  
Making all the vales rejoice?  
Little Lamb, who made thee?  
Dost thou know who made thee?

Little Lamb, I'll tell thee,  
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee:  
He is called by thy name,  
For he calls himself a Lamb.  
He is meek, & he is mild;  
He became a little child.

I a child, & thou a lamb,  
We are called by his name.  
Little Lamb, God bless thee!  
Little Lamb, God bless thee!

## THE LITTLE BLACK BOY

My mother bore me in the southern wild,  
And I am black, but O! my soul is white;  
White as an angel is the English child,  
But I am black, as if bereav'd of light.

My mother taught me underneath a tree,  
And sitting down before the heat of day,  
She took me on her lap and kissed me,  
And pointing to the east, began to say:

"Look on the rising sun: there God does live,  
And gives his light, and gives his heat away;  
And flowers and trees and beasts and man receive  
Comfort in morning, joy in the noonday.

"And we are put on earth a little space,  
That we may learn to bear the beams of love;  
And these black bodies and this sunburnt face  
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove.

"For when our souls have learn'd that heat to bear,  
The cloud will vanish; we shall hear his voice,  
Saying: 'Come out from the grove, my love & care,  
And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice.'"

Thus did my mother say, and kissed me;  
And thus I say to little English boy:

When I from black and he from white cloud free,  
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy,

I'll shade him from the heat, till he can bear  
To lean in joy upon our father's knee;  
And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,  
And be like him, and he will then love me.

## THE BLOSSOM

Merry, Merry Sparrow!  
Under leaves so green  
A happy Blossom  
Sees you swift as arrow  
Seek your cradle narrow  
Near my Bosom.

Pretty, Pretty Robin!  
Under leaves so green  
A happy Blossom  
Hears you sobbing, sobbing,  
Pretty, Pretty Robin,  
Near my Bosom.

## THE CHIMNEY SWEEPER

When my mother died I was very young,  
And my father sold me while yet my tongue  
Could scarcely cry "'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!"  
So your chimneys I sweep, & in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,  
That curl'd like a lamb's back, was shav'd: so I said

"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet, & that very night,  
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight!  
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,  
Were all of them lock'd up in coffins of black.

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,  
And he open'd the coffins & set them all free;  
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,  
And wash in a river, and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,  
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind;  
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
He'd have God for his father, & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark,  
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.  
Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;  
So if all do their duty they need not fear harm.

#### THE LITTLE BOY LOST

"Father! father! where are you going?  
O do not walk so fast.  
Speak, father, speak to your little boy,  
Or else I shall be lost."

The night was dark, no father was there;  
The child was wet with dew;  
The mire was deep, & the child did weep,  
And away the vapour flew.

## THE LITTLE BOY FOUND

The little boy lost in the lonely fen,  
Led by the wand'ring light,  
Began to cry; but God, ever nigh,  
Appear'd like his father in white.

He kissed the child & by the hand led  
And to his mother brought,  
Who in sorrow pale, thro' the lonely dale,  
Her little boy weeping sought.

## LAUGHING SONG

When the green woods laugh with the voice of joy,  
And the dimpling stream runs laughing by;  
When the air does laugh with our merry wit,  
And the green hill laughs with the noise of it;

When the meadows laugh with lively green,  
And the grasshopper laughs in the merry scene,  
When Mary and Susan and Emily  
With their sweet round mouths sing "Ha, Ha, He!"

When the painted birds laugh in the shade,  
Where our table with cherries and nuts is spread,  
Come live & be merry, and join with me,  
To sing the sweet chorus of "Ha, Ha, He!"

## A CRADLE SONG

Sweet dreams, form a shade  
O'er my lovely infant's head;  
Sweet dreams of pleasant streams  
By happy, silent, moony beams.

Sweet sleep, with soft down  
Weave thy brows an infant crown,  
Sweet sleep, Angel mild,  
Hover o'er my happy child.

Sweet smiles, in the night  
Hover over my delight;  
Sweet smiles, Mother's smiles,  
All the livelong night beguiles.

Sweet moans, dovelike sighs,  
Chase not slumber from thy eyes.  
Sweet moans, sweeter smiles,  
All the dovelike moans beguiles.

Sleep, sleep, happy child,  
All creation slept and smil'd;  
Sleep, sleep, happy sleep,  
While o'er thee thy mother weep.

Sweet babe, in thy face  
Holy image I can trace.  
Sweet babe, once like thee,  
Thy maker lay and wept for me,

Wept for me, for thee, for all,  
When he was an infant small

Thou his image ever see,  
Heavenly face that smiles on thee,

Smiles on thee, on me, on all;  
Who became an infant small.  
Infant smiles are his own smiles;  
Heaven & earth to peace beguiles.

### THE DIVINE IMAGE

To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love  
All pray in their distress;  
And to these virtues of delight  
Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love  
Is God, our father dear,  
And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love  
Is Man, his child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart,  
Pity a human face,  
And Love, the human form divine,  
And Peace, the human dress.

Then every man, of every clime,  
That prays in his distress,  
Prays to the human form divine,  
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

And all must love the human form,  
In heathen, turk, or jew;  
Where Mercy, Love, & Pity dwell  
There God is dwelling too.

## HOLY THURSDAY

'Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,  
 The children walking two & two, in red & blue & green,  
 Grey-headed beadles walk'd before, with wands as  
     white as snow,  
 Till into the high dome of Paul's they like Thames'  
     waters flow.

O what a multitude they seem'd, these flowers of London town!  
 Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own.  
 The hum of multitudes was there, but multitudes of  
     lambs,  
 Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent  
     hands.

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice  
     of song,  
 Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of Heaven  
     among.  
 Beneath them sit the aged men, wise guardians of the  
     poor;  
 Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your  
     door.

## NIGHT

The sun descending in the west,  
 The evening star does shine;  
 The birds are silent in their nest,  
 And I must seek for mine.

The moon like a flower  
In heaven's high bower,  
With silent delight  
Sits and smiles on the night.

Farewell, green fields and happy groves,  
Where flocks have took delight.  
Where lambs have nibbled, silent moves  
The feet of angels bright;  
Unseen they pour blessing  
And joy without ceasing,  
On each bud and blossom,  
And each sleeping bosom.

They look in every thoughtless nest,  
Where birds are cover'd warm;  
They visit caves of every beast,  
To keep them all from harm.  
If they see any weeping  
That should have been sleeping,  
They pour sleep on their head,  
And sit down by their bed.

When wolves and tygers howl for prey,  
They pitying stand and weep;  
Seeking to drive their thirst away,  
And keep them from the sheep;  
But if they rush dreadful,  
The angels, most heedful,  
Receive each mild spirit,  
New worlds to inherit.

And there the lion's ruddy eyes  
Shall flow with tears of gold,  
And pitying the tender cries,

And walking round the fold,  
 Saying "Wrath, by his meekness,  
 And by his health, sickness  
 Is driven away  
 From our immortal day.

"And now beside thee, bleating lamb,  
 I can lie down and sleep;  
 Or think on him who bore thy name,  
 Graze after thee and weep.  
 For, wash'd in life's river,  
 My bright mane for ever  
 Shall shine like the gold  
 As I guard o'er the fold."

#### SPRING

Sound the Flute!  
 Now it's mute.  
 Birds delight  
 Day and Night;  
 Nightingale  
 In the dale,  
 Lark in Sky,  
 Merrily,  
 Merrily, Merrily, to welcome in the Year.

Little Boy,  
 Full of joy;  
 Little Girl,  
 Sweet and small;  
 Cock does crow,  
 So do you;  
 Merry voice,

Infant noise,  
Merrily, Merrily, to welcome in the Year.

Little Lamb,  
Here I am;  
Come and lick  
My white neck;  
Let me pull  
Your soft Wool;  
Let me kiss  
Your soft face:  
Merrily, Merrily, we welcome in the Year.

## NURSE'S SONG

When the voices of children are heard on the green  
And laughing is heard on the hill,  
My heart is at rest within my breast  
And everything else is still.

"Then come home, my children, the sun is gone down  
And the dew of night arise;  
Come, come, leave off play, and let us away  
Till the morning appears in the skies."

"No, no, let us play, for it is yet day  
And we cannot go to sleep;  
Besides, in the sky the little birds fly  
And the hills are all cover'd with sheep."

"Well, well, go & play till the light fades away  
And then go home to bed."  
The little ones leaped & shouted & laugh'd  
And all the hills echoed.

## INFANT JOY

"I have no name:  
 I am but two days old."  
 What shall I call thee?  
 "I happy am,  
 Joy is my name."  
 Sweet joy befall thee!

Pretty joy!  
 Sweet joy but two days old,  
 Sweet joy I call thee:  
 Thou dost smile,  
 I sing the while,  
 Sweet joy befall thee!

## A DREAM

Once a dream did weave a shade  
 O'er my Angel-guarded bed,  
 That an Emmet lost its way  
 Where on grass methought I lay.

Troubled, 'wilder'd, and forlorn,  
 Dark, benighted, travel-worn,  
 Over many a tangled spray,  
 All heart-broke I heard her say:

"O, my children! do they cry?  
 Do they hear their father sigh?  
 Now they look abroad to see:  
 Now return and weep for me."

Pitying, I drop'd a tear;  
But I saw a glow-worm near,  
Who replied: "What wailing wight  
Calls the watchman of the night?"

"I am set to light the ground,  
While the beetle goes his round:  
Follow now the beetle's hum;  
Little wanderer, hie thee home."

## ON ANOTHER'S SORROW

Can I see another's woe,  
And not be in sorrow too?  
Can I see another's grief,  
And not seek for kind relief?

Can I see a falling tear,  
And not feel my sorrow's share?  
Can a father see his child  
Weep, nor be with sorrow fill'd?

Can a mother sit and hear  
An infant groan an infant fear?  
No, no! never can it be!  
Never, never can it be!

And can he who smiles on all  
Hear the wren with sorrows small,  
Hear the small bird's grief & care,  
Hear the woes that infants bear,

And not sit beside the nest,  
Pouring pity in their breast;

And not sit the cradle near,  
Weeping tear on infant's tear;

And not sit both night & day,  
Wiping all our tears away?  
O, no! never can it be!  
Never, never can it be!

He doth give his joy to all;  
He becomes an infant small;  
He becomes a man of woe;  
He doth feel the sorrow too.

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh  
And thy maker is not by;  
Think not thou canst weep a tear  
And thy maker is not near.

O! he gives to us his joy  
That our grief he may destroy;  
Till our grief is fled & gone  
He doth sit by us and moan.



# SONGS OF EXPERIENCE

## INTRODUCTION

Hear the voice of the Bard!  
Who Present, Past, & Future, sees;  
Whose ears have heard  
The Holy Word  
That walk'd among the ancient trees,

Calling the lapsed Soul,  
And weeping in the evening dew;  
That might controll  
The starry pole,  
And fallen, fallen light renew!

"O Earth, O Earth, return!  
Arise from out the dewy grass;  
Night is worn,  
And the morn  
Rises from the slumberous mass.

"Turn away no more;  
Why wilt thou turn away?  
The starry floor,  
The wat'ry shore,  
Is giv'n thee till the break of day."

## EARTH'S ANSWER

Earth rais'd up her head  
 From the darkness dread & drear.  
 Her light fled,  
 Stony dread!  
 And her locks cover'd with grey despair.

"Prison'd on wat'ry shore,  
 Starry Jealousy does keep my den:  
 Cold and hoar,  
 Weeping o'er,  
 I hear the father of the ancient men.

"Selfish father of men!  
 Cruel, jealous, selfish fear!  
 Can delight,  
 Chain'd in night,  
 The virgins of youth and morning bear?

"Does spring hide its joy  
 When buds and blossoms grow?  
 Does the sower  
 Sow by night,  
 Or the plowman in darkness plow?

"Break this heavy chain  
 That does freeze my bones around.  
 Selfish! vain!  
 Eternal bane!  
 That free Love with bondage bound."

## THE CLOD AND THE PEBBLE

“Love seeketh not Itself to please,  
Nor for itself hath any care,  
But for another gives its ease,  
And builds a Heaven in Hell’s despair.”

So sung a little Clod of Clay  
Trodden with the cattle’s feet,  
But a Pebble of the brook  
Warbled out these metres meet:

“Love seeketh only Self to please,  
To bind another to Its delight,  
Joys in another’s loss of ease,  
And builds a Hell in Heaven’s despite.”

## HOLY THURSDAY

Is this a holy thing to see  
In a rich and fruitful land,  
Babes reduc’d to misery,  
Fed with cold and usurous hand?

Is that trembling cry a song?  
Can it be a song of joy?  
And so many children poor?  
It is a land of poverty!

And their sun does never shine,  
And their fields are bleak & bare,

And their ways are fill'd with thorns:  
It is eternal winter there.

For where-e'er the sun does shine,  
And where-e'er the rain does fall,  
Babe can never hunger there,  
Nor poverty the mind appall.

### THE LITTLE GIRL LOST

In futurity  
I prophetic see  
That the earth from sleep  
(Grave the sentence deep)

Shall arise and seek  
For her maker meek;  
And the desert wild  
Become a garden mild.

\* \* \*

In the southern clime,  
Where the summer's prime  
Never fades away,  
Lovely Lyca lay.

Seven summers old  
Lovely Lyca told;  
She had wander'd long  
Hearing wild birds' song.

"Sweet sleep, come to me  
Underneath this tree.

Do father, mother weep,  
Where can Lyca sleep?

"Lost in desert wild  
Is your little child.  
How can Lyca sleep  
If her mother weep?

"If her heart does ake  
Then let Lyca wake;  
If my mother sleep,  
Lyca shall not weep.

"Frowning, frowning night,  
O'er this desert bright  
Let thy moon arise  
While I close my eyes."

Sleeping Lyca lay  
While the beasts of prey,  
Come from caverns deep,  
View'd the maid asleep.

The kingly lion stood  
And the virgin view'd,  
Then he gamboll'd round  
O'er the hallow'd ground.

Leopards, tygers, play  
Round her as she lay,  
While the lion old  
Bow'd his mane of gold

And her bosom lick,  
And upon her neck

From his eyes of flame  
Ruby tears there came;

While the lioness  
Loos'd her slender dress,  
And naked they convey'd  
To caves the sleeping maid.

#### THE LITTLE GIRL FOUND

All the night in woe  
Lyca's parents go  
Over vallies deep,  
While the desarts weep.

Tired and woe-begone,  
Hoarse with making moan,  
Arm in arm seven days  
They trac'd the desert ways.

Seven nights they sleep  
Among shadows deep,  
And dream they see their child  
Starv'd in desert wild.

Pale, thro' pathless ways  
The fancied image strays  
Famish'd, weeping, weak,  
With hollow piteous shriek.

Rising from unrest,  
The trembling woman prest  
With feet of weary woe:  
She could no further go.

In his arms he bore  
Her, arm'd with sorrow sore;  
Till before their way  
A couching lion lay.

Turning back was vain:  
Soon his heavy mane  
Bore them to the ground.  
Then he stalk'd around,

Smelling to his prey;  
But their fears allay  
When he licks their hands,  
And silent by them stands.

They look upon his eyes  
Fill'd with deep surprise,  
And wondering behold  
A spirit arm'd in gold.

On his head a crown,  
On his shoulders down  
Flow'd his golden hair.  
Gone was all their care.

"Follow me," he said;  
"Weep not for the maid;  
In my palace deep  
Lyca lies asleep."

Then they followed  
Where the vision led,  
And saw their sleeping child  
Among tygers wild.

To this day they dwell  
 In a lonely dell;  
 Nor fear the wolvish howl  
 Nor the lions' growl.

### THE CHIMNEY SWEEPER

A little black thing among the snow,  
 Crying "'weep! 'weep!' in notes of woe!  
 "Where are thy father & mother? say?"  
 "They are both gone up to the church to pray.

"Because I was happy upon the heath,  
 And smil'd among the winter's snow,  
 They clothed me in the clothes of death,  
 And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

"And because I am happy & dance & sing,  
 They think they have done me no injury,  
 And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King,  
 Who make up a heaven of our misery."

### NURSE'S SONG

When the voices of children are heard on the green  
 And whisp'rings are in the dale;  
 The days of my youth rise fresh in my mind,  
 My face turns green and pale.

Then come home, my children, the sun is gone down,  
 And the dew's of night arise;  
 Your spring & your day are wasted in play,  
 And your winter and night in disguise.

## THE SICK ROSE

O rose, thou art sick!  
The invisible worm  
That flies in the night,  
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed  
Of crimson joy,  
And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy.

## THE FLY

Little Fly,  
Thy summer's play  
My thoughtless hand  
Has brush'd away.

Am not I  
A fly like thee?  
Or art not thou  
A man like me?

For I dance,  
And drink, & sing,  
Till some blind hand  
Shall brush my wing.

If thought is life  
And strength & breath,

And the want  
Of thought is death;

Then am I  
A happy fly,  
If I live  
Or if I die.

#### THE ANGEL

I dreamt a Dream! what can it mean?  
And that I was a maiden Queen,  
Guarded by an Angel mild:  
Witless woe was ne'er beguil'd!

And I wept both night and day,  
And he wip'd my tears away,  
And I wept both day and night,  
And hid from him my heart's delight.

So he took his wings and fled;  
Then the morn blush'd rosy red;  
I dried my tears, & arm'd my fears  
With ten thousand shields and spears.

Soon my Angel came again:  
I was arm'd, he came in vain;  
For the time of youth was fled,  
And grey hairs were on my head.

## THE TYGER

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand dare sieze the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,  
And water'd heaven with their tears,  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

## MY PRETTY ROSE-TREE

A flower was offer'd to me,  
 Such a flower as May never bore;  
 But I said "I've a Pretty Rose-tree,"  
 And I passed the sweet flower o'er.

Then I went to my Pretty Rose-tree,  
 To tend her by day and by night;  
 But my Rose turn'd away with jealousy,  
 And her thorns were my only delight.

## AH! SUN-FLOWER

Ah, Sun-flower! weary of time,  
 Who countest the steps of the Sun,  
 Seeking after that sweet golden clime  
 Where the traveller's journey is done:

Where the Youth pined away with desire,  
 And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow  
 Arise from their graves, and aspire  
 Where my Sun-flower wishes to go.

## THE LILLY

The modest Rose puts forth a thorn,  
 The humble Sheep a threat'ning horn;  
 While the Lilly white shall in Love delight,  
 Nor a thorn, nor a threat, stain her beauty bright.

## THE GARDEN OF LOVE

I went to the Garden of Love,  
And saw what I never had seen:  
A Chapel was built in the midst,  
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,  
And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door;  
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love  
That so many sweet flowers bore;

And I saw it was filled with graves,  
And tomb-stones where flowers should be;  
And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,  
And binding with briars my joys & desires.

## THE LITTLE VAGABOND

Dear Mother, dear Mother, the Church is cold,  
But the Ale-house is healthy & pleasant & warm;  
Besides I can tell where I am used well,  
Such usage in Heaven will never do well.

But if at the Church they would give us some Ale,  
And a pleasant fire our souls to regale,  
We'd sing and we'd pray all the live-long day,  
Nor ever once wish from the Church to stray.

Then the Parson might preach, & drink, & sing,  
And we'd be as happy as birds in the spring;

112 SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE

And modest Dame Lurch, who is always at Church,  
Would not have bandy children, nor fasting, nor birch.

And God, like a father rejoicing to see  
His children as pleasant and happy as he,  
Would have no more quarrel with the Devil or the  
Barrel,  
But kiss him, & give him both drink and apparel.

L O N D O N

I wander thro' each charter'd street,  
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infants cry of fear,  
In every voice, in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry  
Every black'ning Church appalls;  
And the hapless Soldier's sigh  
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful Harlots curse  
Blasts the new-born Infants tear,  
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

## THE HUMAN ABSTRACT

Pity would be no more  
If we did not make somebody Poor;  
And Mercy no more could be  
If all were as happy as we.

And mutual fear brings peace,  
Till the selfish loves increase:  
Then Cruelty knits a snare,  
And spreads his baits with care.

He sits down with holy fears,  
And waters the ground with tears;  
Then Humility takes its root  
Underneath his foot.

Soon spreads the dismal shade  
Of Mystery over his head;  
And the Catterpillar and Fly  
Feed on the Mystery.

And it bears the fruit of Deceit,  
Ruddy and sweet to eat;  
And the Raven his nest has made  
In its thickest shade.

The Gods of the earth and sea  
Sought thro' Nature to find this Tree;  
But their search was all in vain:  
There grows one in the Human Brain.

## INFANT SORROW

My mother groan'd! my father wept.  
 Into the dangerous world I leapt:  
 Helpless, naked, piping loud:  
 Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my father's hands,  
 Striving against my swadling bands,  
 Bound and weary I thought best  
 To sulk upon my mother's breast.

## A POISON TREE

I was angry with my friend:  
 I told my wrath, my wrath did end.  
 I was angry with my foe:  
 I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I water'd it in fears,  
 Night & morning with my tears;  
 And I sunned it with smiles,  
 And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,  
 Till it bore an apple bright;  
 And my foe beheld it shine,  
 And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden stole  
 When the night had veil'd the pole:

In the morning glad I see  
My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree.

## A LITTLE BOY LOST

'Nought loves another as itself,  
Nor venerates another so,  
Nor is it possible to Thought  
A greater than itself to know:

"And Father, how can I love you  
Or any of my brothers more?  
I love you like the little bird  
That picks up crumbs around the door."

The Priest sat by and heard the child,  
In trembling zeal he siez'd his hair:  
He led him by his little coat,  
And all admir'd the Priestly care.

And standing on the altar high,  
"Lo! what a fiend is here!" said he,  
"One who sets reason up for judge  
Of our most holy Mystery."

The weeping child could not be heard,  
The weeping parents wept in vain;  
They strip'd him to his little shirt,  
And bound him in an iron chain;

And burn'd him in a holy place,  
Where many had been burn'd before:  
The weeping parents wept in vain.  
Are such things done on Albion's shore?

## A LITTLE GIRL LOST

*Children of the future Age  
Reading this indignant page,  
Know that in a former time  
Love! sweet Love! was thought a crime.*

In the Age of Gold,  
Free from winter's cold,  
Youth and maiden bright  
To the holy light,  
Naked in the sunny beams delight.

Once a youthful pair,  
Fill'd with softest care,  
Met in garden bright  
Where the holy light  
Had just remov'd the curtains of the night.

There, in rising day,  
On the grass they play;  
Parents were afar,  
Strangers came not near,  
And the maiden soon forgot her fear.

Tired with kisses sweet,  
They agree to meet  
When the silent sleep  
Waves o'er heaven's deep,  
And the weary tired wanderers weep.

To her father white  
Came the maiden bright;

But his loving look,  
Like the holy book,  
All her tender limbs with terror shook.

“Ona! pale and weak!  
To thy father speak:  
O, the trembling fear!  
O, the dismal care!  
That shakes the blossoms of my hoary hair.”



## ADDITIONAL POEMS

(1794-1801)

### TO TIRZAH

Whate'er is Born of Mortal Birth  
Must be consumed with the Earth  
To rise from Generation free:  
Then what have I to do with thee?

The Sexes sprung from Shame & Pride,  
Blow'd in the morn: in evening died;  
But Mercy chang'd Death into Sleep;  
The Sexes rose to work & weep.

Thou, Mother of my Mortal part,  
With cruelty didst mould my Heart,  
And with false self-deceiving tears  
Didst bind my Nostrils, Eyes, & Ears:

Didst close my Tongue in senseless clay,  
And me to Mortal Life betray.  
The Death of Jesus set me free:  
Then what have I to do with thee?

### THE SCHOOLBOY

I love to rise in a summer morn  
When the birds sing on every tree;

The distant huntsman winds his horn,  
And the sky-lark sings with me.  
O! what sweet company.

But to go to school in a summer morn,  
O! it drives all joy away;  
Under a cruel eye outworn,  
The little ones spend the day  
In sighing and dismay.

Ah! then at times I drooping sit,  
And spend many an anxious hour,  
Nor in my book can I take delight,  
Nor sit in learning's bower,  
Worn thro' with the dreary shower.

How can the bird that is born for joy  
Sit in a cage and sing?  
How can a child, when fears annoy,  
But droop his tender wing,  
And forget his youthful spring?

O! father & mother, if buds are nip'd  
And blossoms blown away,  
And if the tender plants are strip'd  
Of their joy in the springing day,  
By sorrow and care's dismay,

How shall the summer arise in joy,  
Or the summer fruits appear?  
Or how shall we gather what griefs destroy,  
Or bless the mellowing year,  
When the blasts of winter appear?

## THE VOICE OF THE ANCIENT BARD

Youth of delight, come hither,  
 And see the opening morn,  
 Image of truth new born.  
 Doubt is fled, & clouds of reason,  
 Dark disputes & artful teasing.  
 Folly is an endless maze,  
 Tangled roots perplex her ways.  
 How many have fallen there!  
 They stumble all night over bones of the dead,  
 And feel they know not what but care,  
 And wish to lead others, when they should be led.

## A DIVINE IMAGE

Cruelty has a Human Heart,  
 And Jealousy a Human Face;  
 Terror the Human Form Divine,  
 And Secrecy the Human Dress.

The Human Dress is forged Iron,  
 The Human Form a fiery Forge,  
 The Human Face a Furnace seal'd,  
 The Human Heart its hungry Gorge.

*IV.*

VERSES  
AND  
FRAGMENTS

FROM THE  
ROSSETTI AND PICKERING  
MANUSCRIPTS





## FIRST SERIES

(1793-1799)

### §

Never seek to tell thy love  
Love that never told can be;  
For the gentle wind does move  
Silently, invisibly.

I told my love, I told my love,  
I told her all my heart,  
Trembling, cold, in ghastly fears—  
Ah, she doth depart.

Soon as she was gone from me  
A traveller came by  
Silently, invisibly—  
O, was no deny.

### §

I laid me down upon a bank  
Where love lay sleeping.  
I heard among the rushes dank  
Weeping, Weeping.

Then I went to the heath & the wild  
To the thistles & thorns of the waste

And they told me how they were beguil'd,  
Driven out, & compell'd to be chaste.

## §

I saw a chapel all of gold  
That none did dare to enter in,  
And many weeping stood without,  
Weeping, mourning, worshipping.

I saw a serpent rise between  
The white pillars of the door,  
And he forc'd & forc'd & forc'd,  
Down the golden hinges tore.

And along the pavement sweet,  
Set with pearls & rubies bright,  
All his slimy length he drew,  
Till upon the altar white

Vomiting his poison out  
On the bread & on the wine.  
So I turn'd into a sty  
And laid me down among the swine.

## §

I asked a thief to steal me a peach:  
He turned up his eyes.  
I ask'd a lithe lady to lie her down:  
Holy & meek she cries.

As soon as I went an angel came:  
He wink'd at the thief  
And smil'd at the dame,  
And without one word spoke  
Had a peach from the tree,  
And 'twixt earnest & joke  
Enjoy'd the Lady.

## §

I heard an Angel singing  
When the day was springing,  
"Mercy, Pity, Peace  
Is the world's release."

Thus he sung all day  
Over the new mown hay,  
Till the sun went down  
And haycocks looked brown.

I heard a Devil curse  
Over the heath & the furze,  
"Mercy could be no more,  
If there was nobody poor,

"And pity no more could be,  
If all were as happy as we."  
At his curse the sun went down,  
And the heavens gave a frown.

Down pour'd the heavy rain  
Over the new reap'd grain,  
And Miseries' increase  
Is Mercy, Pity, Peace.

## A CRADLE SONG

Sleep, Sleep, beauty bright  
Dreaming o'er the joys of night.  
Sleep, Sleep: in thy sleep  
Little sorrows sit & weep.

Sweet Babe, in thy face  
Soft desires I can trace  
Secret joys & secret smiles  
Little pretty infant wiles.

As thy softest limbs I feel  
Smiles as of the morning steal  
O'er thy cheek & o'er thy breast  
Where thy little heart does rest.

O, the cunning wiles that creep  
In thy little heart asleep.  
When thy little heart does wake,  
Then the dreadful lightnings break.

From thy cheek & from thy eye  
O'er the youthful harvests nigh  
Infant wiles & infant smiles  
Heaven & Earth of peace beguiles.

## §

I fear'd the fury of my wind  
Would blight all blossoms fair & true;

And my sun it shin'd & shin'd  
And my wind it never blew.

But a blossom fair or true  
Was not found on any tree;  
For all blossoms grew & grew  
Fruitless, false, tho' fair to see.

## §

Why should I care for the men of thames,  
Or the cheating waves of charter'd streams,  
Or shrink at the little blasts of fear  
That the hireling blows into my ear?

Tho' born on the cheating banks of Thames,  
Tho' his waters bathed my infant limbs,  
The Ohio shall wash his stains from me:  
I was born a slave, but I go to be free.

## INFANT SORROW

My mother groan'd, my father wept;  
Into the dangerous world I leapt,  
Helpless, naked, piping loud,  
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my father's hands  
Striving against my swaddling bands,  
Bound & weary, I thought best  
To sulk upon my mother's breast.

When I saw that rage was vain,  
And to sulk would nothing gain,  
Turning many a trick & wile,  
I began to soothe & smile.

And I sooth'd day after day  
Till upon the ground I stray;  
And I smil'd night after night,  
Seeking only for delight.

And I saw before me shine  
Clusters of the wand'ring vine,  
And many a lovely flower & tree  
Stretch'd their blossoms out to me.

My father then with holy look,  
In his hands a holy book,  
Pronounc'd curses on my head  
And bound me in a mirtle shade.

#### IN A MIRTLE SHADE

Why should I be bound to thee,  
O my lovely mirtle tree?  
Love, free love, cannot be bound  
To any tree that grows on ground.

O, how sick & weary I  
Underneath my mirtle lie,  
Like to dung upon the ground  
Underneath my mirtle bound.

Oft my mirtle sigh'd in vain  
To behold my heavy chain;

Oft my father saw us sigh,  
And laugh'd at our simplicity.

So I smote him & his gore  
Stain'd the roots my mirtle bore.  
But the time of youth is fled,  
And grey hairs are on my head.

## §

Silent, Silent Night  
Quench the holy light  
Of thy torches bright.

For possess'd of Day  
Thousand spirits stray  
That sweet joys betray

Why should joys be sweet  
Used with deceit  
Nor with sorrows meet?

But an honest joy  
Does itself destroy  
For a harlot coy.

## §

O lapwing, thou fliest around the heath,  
Nor seest the net that is spread beneath.  
Why dost thou not fly among the corn fields?  
They cannot spread nets where a harvest yields.

## §

Thou hast a lap full of seed,  
And this is a fine country.  
Why dost thou not cast thy seed  
And live in it merrily?

Shall I cast it on the sand  
And turn it into fruitful land?  
For on no other ground  
Can I sow my seed  
Without tearing up  
Some stinking weed.

## TO NOBODADDY

Why art thou silent & invisible,  
Father of Jealousy?  
Why dost thou hide thy self in clouds  
From every searching Eye?

Why darkness & obscurity  
In all thy words & laws,  
That none dare eat the fruit but from  
The wily serpent's jaws?  
Or is it because Secresy gains females' loud applause?

## §

Are not the joys of morning sweeter  
Than the joys of night?

And are the vig'rous joys of youth  
Ashamed of the light?

Let age & sickness silent rob  
The vineyards in the night;  
But those who burn with vig'rous youth  
Pluck fruits before the light.

## §

Love to looks is always blind,  
Always is to joy inclin'd,  
Lawless, wing'd, & unconfin'd,  
And breaks all chains from every mind.

Deceit to secrecy confin'd,  
Lawful, cautious, & refin'd;  
To every thing but interest blind,  
And forges fetters for the mind.

## THE WILD FLOWER'S SONG

As I wander'd the forest,  
The green leaves among,  
I heard a wild flower  
Singing a song:

"I slept in the dark  
In the silent night,  
I murmur'd my fears  
And I felt delight.

"In the morning I went  
As rosy as morn

## VERSES AND FRAGMENTS

To seek for new Joy,  
But I met with scorn."

## SOFT SNOW

I walked abroad in a snowy day:  
I ask'd the soft snow with me to play:  
She play'd & she melted in all her prime,  
And the winter call'd it a dreadful crime.

## AN ANCIENT PROVERB

Remove away that black'ning church:  
Remove away that marriage hearse:  
Remove away that place of blood:  
You'll quite remove the ancient curse.

## TO MY MIRTLE

To a lovely mirtle bound,  
Blossoms show'ring all around,  
O, how sick & weary I  
Underneath my mirtle lie.  
Why should I be bound to thee,  
O, my lovely mirtle tree?

## MERLIN'S PROPHECY

The harvest shall flourish in wintry weather  
When two virginities meet together:

The King & the Priest must be tied in a tether  
Before two virgins can meet together.

## DAY

The Sun arises in the East,  
Cloth'd in robes of blood & gold;  
Swords & spears & wrath increast  
All around his bosom roll'd,  
Crown'd with warlike fires & raging desires.

## THE MARRIAGE RING

"Come hither my sparrows,  
My little arrows.  
If a tear or a smile  
Will a man beguile,  
If an amorous delay  
Clouds a sunshiny day,  
If the step of a foot  
Smites the heart to its root,  
'Tis the marriage ring  
Makes each fairy a king."

So a fairy sung.  
From the leaves I sprung.  
He leap'd from the spray  
To flee away.  
But in my hat caught  
He soon shall be taught.  
Let him laugh, let him cry,  
He's my butterfly;

For I've pull'd out the sting  
Of the marriage ring.

## §

The sword sung on the barren heath,  
The sickle in the fruitful field:  
The sword he sung a song of death,  
But could not make the sickle yield.

## §

Abstinence sow'd seed all over  
The luddy limb & morning hair,  
But Desire Gratified  
Plants fruits of life & beauty there.

## §

In a wife I would desire  
What in whores is always found—  
The lineaments of Gratified desire.

## §

If you trap the moment before it's ripe,  
The tears of repentence you'll certainly wipe;  
But if once you let the ripe moment go  
You can never wipe off the tears of woe.

## ETERNITY

He who binds to himself a joy  
Does the winged life destroy;  
But he who kisses the joy as it flies  
Lives in eternity's sun rise.

## THE QUESTION ANSWER'D

What is it men in women do require?  
The lineaments of Gratified Desire.  
What is it women do in men require?  
The lineaments of Gratified Desire.

## LACEDEMONIAN INSTRUCTION

"Come hither, my boy, tell me what thou seest there."  
"A fool tangled in a religious snare."

## RICHES

The countless gold of a merry heart,  
The rubies & pearls of a loving eye,  
The indolent never can bring to the mart,  
Nor the secret hoard up in his treasury.

## AN ANSWER TO THE PARSON

"Why of the sheep do you not learn peace?"  
"Because I don't want you to shear my fleece."

## §

The look of love alarms  
Because 'tis fill'd with fire;  
But the look of soft deceit  
Shall win the lover's hire.

## §

Which are beauties sweetest dress?  
Soft deceit & idleness,  
These are beauties sweetest dress.

MOTTO TO THE SONGS OF  
INNOCENCE & OF EXPERIENCE

The Good are attracted by Men's perceptions,  
And think not for themselves;  
Till Experience teaches them to catch  
And to cage the Fairies & Elves.

And then the Knave begins to snarl  
And the Hypocrite to howl;  
And all his good Friends shew their private ends,  
And the Eagle is known from the Owl.

## §

Her whole Life is an Epigram, smart, smooth, & neatly  
pen'd,  
Platted quite neat to catch applause with a sliding noose  
at the end.

## §

An old maid early—e'er I knew  
Ought but the love that on me grew;  
And now I'm cover'd o'er & o'er  
And wish that I had been a whore.

O, I cannot, cannot find  
The undaunted courage of a Virgin Mind,  
For Early I in love was crost,  
Before my flower of love was lost.

## §

"Let the Brothels of Paris be opened  
With many an alluring dance  
To awake the Pestilence thro' the city,"  
Said the beautiful Queen of France.

The King awoke on his couch of gold,  
As soon as he heard these tidings told:  
"Arise & come, both fife & drum,  
And the Famine shall eat both crust & crumb."

Then he swore a great & solemn Oath:  
"To kill the people I am loth,  
But If they rebel, they must go to hell:  
They shall have a Priest & a passing bell."

Then old Nobodaddy aloft  
Farted & belch'd & cough'd,

And said, "I love hanging & drawing & quartering  
Every bit as well as war & slaughtering.  
Damn praying & singing,  
Unless they will bring in  
The blood of ten thousand by fighting or swinging."

The Queen of France just touched this Globe,  
And the Pestilence darted from her robe;  
But our good Queen quite grows to the ground,  
And a great many suckers grow all around.

Fayette beside King Lewis stood;  
He saw him sign his hand;  
And soon he saw the famine rage  
About the fruitful land.

Fayette beheld the Queen to smile  
And wink her lovely eye;  
And soon he saw the pestilence  
From street to street to fly.

Fayette beheld the King & Queen  
In tears & iron bound;  
But mute Fayette wept tear for tear,  
And guarded them around.

Fayette, Fayette, thou'rt bought & sold,  
And sold is thy happy morrow;  
Thou gavest the tears of Pity away  
In exchange for the tears of sorrow.

Who will exchange his own fire side  
For the steps of another's door?  
Who will exchange his wheaten loaf  
For the links of a dungeon floor?

O, who would smile on the wintry seas,  
& Pity the stormy roar?  
Or who will exchange his new born child  
For the dog at the wintry door?

## §

A fairy leapt upon my knee  
Singing & dancing merrily;  
I said, "Thou thing of patches, rings,  
Pins, Necklaces, & such like things,  
Disguiser of the Female Form,  
Thou paltry, gilded, poisonous worm!"  
Weeping, he fell upon my thigh,  
And thus in tears did soft reply:  
"Knowest thou not, O Fairies' Lord!  
How much by us Contemn'd, Abhorr'd,  
Whatever hides the Female form  
That cannot bear the Mental storm?  
Therefore in Pity still we give  
Our lives to make the Female live;  
And what would turn into disease  
We turn to what will joy & please."

LINES FOR THE ILLUSTRATIONS  
TO GRAY'S POEMS

Around the Springs of Gray my wild root weaves.  
Traveller repose & Dream among my leaves.

## TO MRS. ANNA FLAXMAN

A little Flower grew in a lonely Vale.  
Its form was lovely but its colours pale.  
One standing in the Porches of the Sun,  
When his Meridian Glories were begun,  
Leap'd from the steps of fire & on the grass  
Alighted where this little flower was.  
With hands divine he mov'd the gentle Sod  
And took the Flower up in its native Clod;  
Then planting it upon a Mountain's brow—  
"Tis your own fault if you don't flourish now."



## SECOND SERIES

(1800-1810)

§

The Angel that presided o'er my birth  
Said, "Little creature, form'd of Joy & Mirth,  
Go love without the help of any Thing on Earth."

### MORNING

To find the Western path  
Right thro' the Gates of Wrath  
I urge my way;  
Sweet Mercy leads me on:  
With soft repentant moan  
I see the break of day.

The war of swords & spears  
Melted by dewy tears  
Exhales on high;  
The Sun is freed from fears  
And with soft grateful tears  
Ascends the sky.

§

Terror in the house does roar,  
But Pity stands before the door.

## §

Mock on, Mock on, Voltaire, Rousseau:  
Mock on, Mock on; 'tis all in vain!  
You throw the sand against the wind,  
And the wind blows it back again.

And every sand becomes a Gem  
Reflected in the beams divine;  
Blown back they blind the mocking Eye,  
But still in Israel's paths they shine.

The Atoms of Democritus  
And Newton's Particles of light  
Are sands upon the Red sea shore,  
Where Israel's tents do shine so bright.

## §

My Spectre around me night & day  
Like a Wild beast guards my way.  
My Emanation far within  
Weeps incessantly for my Sin.

A Fathomless & boundless deep,  
There we wander, there we weep;  
On the hungry craving wind  
My Spectre follows thee behind.

He scents thy footsteps in the snow,  
Wheresoever thou dost go

Thro' the wintry hail & rain.  
When wilt thou return again?

Dost thou not in Pride & scorn  
Fill with tempests all my morn,  
And with jealousies & fears  
Fill my pleasant nights with tears?

Seven of my sweet loves thy knife  
Has bereaved of their life.  
Their marble tombs I built with tears  
And with cold & shuddering fears.

Seven more loves weep night & day  
Round the tombs where my loves lay,  
And seven more loves attend each night  
Around my couch with torches bright.

And seven more Loves in my bed  
Crown with wine my mournful head,  
Pitying & forgiving all  
Thy transgressions, great & small.

When wilt thou return & view  
My loves, & them to life renew?  
When wilt thou return & live?  
When wilt thou pity as I forgive?

"Never, Never, I return:  
Still for Victory I burn.  
Living, thee alone I'll have  
And when dead I'll be thy Grave.

"Thro' the Heaven & Earth & Hell  
Thou shalt never never quell:

I will fly & thou pursue,  
Night & Morn the flight renew."

Till I turn from Female Love,  
And root up the Infernal Grove,  
I shall never worthy be  
To Step into Eternity.

And, to end thy cruel mocks,  
Annihilate thee on the rocks,  
And another form create  
To be subservient to my Fate.

Let us agree to give up Love,  
And root up the infernal grove;  
Then shall we return & see  
The worlds of happy Eternity.

& Throughout all Eternity  
I forgive you, you forgive me.  
As our dear Redeemer said:  
"This the Wine & this the Bread."

[*Additional stanzas*]

O'er my Sins thou sit & moan:  
Hast thou no sins of thy own?  
O'er my Sins thou sit & weep,  
And lull thy own Sins fast asleep.

What Transgressions I commit  
Are for thy Transgressions fit.  
They thy Harlots, thou their slave,  
And my Bed becomes their Grave.

Poor pale pitiable form  
That I follow in a Storm,  
Iron tears & groans of lead  
Bind around my aking head.

## THE MENTAL TRAVELLER

I travel'd thro' a Land of Men,  
A Land of Men & Women too,  
And heard & saw such dreadful things  
As cold Earth wanderers never knew.

For there the Babe is born in joy  
That was begotten in dire woe;  
Just as we Reap in joy the fruit  
Which we in bitter tears did sow.

And if the Babe is born a Boy  
He's given to a Woman Old,  
Who nails him down upon a rock,  
Catches his shrieks in cups of gold.

She binds iron thorns around his head,  
She pierces both his hands & feet,  
She cuts his heart out at his side  
To make it feel both cold & heat.

Her fingers number every Nerve,  
Just as a Miser counts his gold;  
She lives upon his shrieks & cries,  
And she grows young as he grows old.

Till he becomes a bleeding youth,  
And she becomes a Virgin bright;

Then he rends up his Manacles  
And binds her down for his delight.

He plants himself in all her Nerves,  
Just as a Husbandman his mould;  
And she becomes his dwelling place  
And Garden fruitful seventy fold.

An aged Shadow, soon he fades,  
Wand'ring round an Earthly Cot,  
Full filled all with gems & gold  
Which he by industry had got.

And these are the gems of the Human Soul,  
The rubies & pearls of a lovesick eye,  
The countless gold of the akeing heart,  
The martyr's groan & the lover's sigh.

They are his meat, they are his drink;  
He feeds the Beggar & the Poor  
And the wayfaring Traveller:  
For ever open is his door.

His grief is their eternal joy;  
They make the roofs & walls to ring;  
Till from the fire on the hearth  
A little Female Babe does spring.

And she is all of solid fire  
And gems & gold, that none his hand  
Dares stretch to touch her Baby form,  
Or wrap her in his swaddling-band.

But She comes to the Man she loves,  
If young or old, or rich or poor;

They soon drive out the aged Host,  
A Beggar at another's door.

He wanders weeping far away,  
Until some other take him in;  
Oft blind & age-bent, sore distress,  
Untill he can a Maiden win.

And to allay his freezing Age  
The Poor Man takes her in his arms,  
The Colours fade before his sight,  
The Girdle and its lovely Charms

The Garter he scatter'd thro' the Land,  
For the Eye altering alters all;  
The Senses roll themselves to fear  
And the flat Earth becomes a Bol.

The stars, sun, Moon, all shrink away,  
A desert vast without a bound,  
And nothing left to eat or drink,  
And a dark desert all around.

The honey of her Infant lips,  
The bread & wine of her sweet smile,  
The wild game of her roving Eye,  
Does him to Infancy beguile;

For as he eats & drinks he grows  
Younger & younger every day;  
And on the desert wild they both  
Wander in terror & dismay.

Like the wild Stag she flees away,  
Her fear plants many a thicket wild;

While he pursues her night & day,  
By various arts of Love beguil'd,

By various arts of Love & Hate,  
Till the wide desert planted o'er  
With Labyrinths of wayward Love,  
Where roam the Lion, Wolf & Boar,

Till he becomes a wayward Babe,  
And she a weeping Woman Old.  
Then many a Lover wanders here;  
The Sun & Stars are nearer roll'd.

The trees bring forth sweet Extacy  
To all who in the desert roam;  
Till many a City there is Built,  
And many a pleasant Shepherd's home.

But when they find the frowning Babe,  
Terror strikes thro' the region wide:  
They cry "The Babe! the Babe is Born!"  
And flee away on Every side.

For who dare touch the frowning form,  
His arm is wither'd to its root;  
Lions, Boars, Wolves, all howling flee,  
And every Tree does shed its fruit.

And none can touch that frowning form,  
Except it be a Woman Old;  
She nails him down upon the Rock,  
And all is done as I have told.

## THE CRYSTAL CABINET

The Maiden caught me in the Wild,  
Where I was dancing merrily;  
She put me into her Cabinet  
And Lock'd me up with a golden Key.

This Cabinet is form'd of Gold  
And Pearl & Crystal shining bright,  
And within it opens into a World  
And a little lovely Moony Night.

Another England there I saw,  
Another London with its Tower,  
Another Thames & other Hills,  
And another pleasant Surrey Bower,

Another Maiden like herself,  
Translucent, lovely, shining clear,  
Threefold each in the other clos'd—  
O, what a pleasant trembling fear!

O, what a smile! a threefold Smile  
Fill'd me, that like a flame I burn'd;  
I bent to Kiss the lovely Maid,  
And found a Threefold Kiss return'd.

I strove to sieze the inmost Form  
With ardor fierce & hands of flame,  
But burst the Crystal Cabinet,  
And like a Weeping Babe became—

A weeping Babe upon the wild,  
And Weeping Woman pale reclin'd,  
And in the outward air again  
I fill'd with woes the passing Wind.

## AUGURIES OF INNOCENCE

To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour.

A Robin Red breast in a Cage  
Puts all Heaven in a Rage.  
A dove house fill'd with doves & Pigeons  
Shudders Hell thro' all its regions.  
A dog starv'd at his Master's Gate  
Predicts the ruin of the State.  
A Horse misus'd upon the Road  
Calls to Heaven for Human blood.  
Each outcry of the hunted Hare  
A fibre from the Brain does tear.  
A Skylark wounded in the wing,  
A Cherubim does cease to sing.  
The Game Cock clip'd & arm'd for fight  
Does the Rising Sun affright.  
Every Wolf's & Lion's howl  
Raises from Hell a Human Soul.  
The wild deer, wand'ring here & there,  
Keeps the Human Soul from Care.  
The Lamb misus'd breeds Public strife  
And yet forgives the Butcher's Knife.  
The Bat that flits at close of Eve  
Has left the Brain that won't Believe.

The Owl that calls upon the Night  
Speaks the Unbeliever's fright.  
He who shall hurt the little Wren  
Shall never be belov'd by Men.  
He who the Ox to wrath has mov'd  
Shall never be by Woman lov'd.  
The wanton Boy that kills the Fly  
Shall feel the Spider's enmity.  
He who torments the Chafer's sprite  
Weaves a Bower in endless Night.  
The Catterpillar on the Leaf  
Repeats to thee thy Mother's grief.  
Kill not the Moth nor Butterfly,  
For the Last Judgment draweth nigh.  
He who shall train the Horse to War  
Shall never pass the Polar Bar.  
The Beggar's Dog & Widow's Cat,  
Feed them & thou wilt grow fat.  
The Gnat that sings his Summer's song  
Poison gets from Slander's tongue.  
The poison of the Snake & Newt  
Is the sweat of Envy's Foot.  
The Poison of the Honey Bee  
Is the Artist's Jealousy.  
The Prince's Robes & Beggar's Rags  
Are Toadstools on the Miser's Bags.  
A truth that's told with bad intent  
Beats all the Lies you can invent.  
It is right it should be so;  
Man was made for Joy & Woe;  
And when this we rightly know  
Thro' the World we safely go,  
Joy & Woe are woven fine,  
A Clothing for the Soul divine;  
Under every grief & pine

Runs a joy with silken twine.  
The Babe is more than swadling Bands;  
Throughout all these Human Lands  
Tools were made, & Born were hands,  
Every Farmer Understands.  
Every Tear from Every Eye  
Becomes a Babe in Eternity;  
This is caught by Females bright  
And return'd to its own delight.  
The Bleat, the Bark, Bellow & Roar  
Are Waves that Beat on Heaven's Shore.  
The Babe that weeps the Rod beneath  
Writes Revenge in realms of death.  
The Beggar's Rags, fluttering in Air,  
Does to Rags the Heavens tear.  
The Soldier, arm'd with Sword & Gun,  
Palsied strikes the Summer's Sun.  
The poor Man's Farthing is worth more  
Than all the Gold on Afric's Shore.  
One Mite wrung from the Labrer's hands  
Shall buy & sell the Miser's Lands:  
Or, if protected from on high,  
Does that whole Nation sell & buy.  
He who mocks the Infant's Faith  
Shall be mock'd in Age & Death.  
He who shall teach the Child to Doubt  
The rotting Grave shall ne'er get out.  
He who respects the Infant's faith  
Triumphs over Hell & Death.  
The Child's Toys & the Old Man's Reasons  
Are the Fruits of the Two seasons.  
The Questioner, who sits so sly,  
Shall never know how to Reply.  
He who replies to words of Doubt

Doth put the Light of Knowledge out.  
The Strongest Poison ever known  
Came from Caesar's Laurel Crown.  
Nought can deform the Human Race  
Like to the Armour's iron brace.  
When Gold & Gems adorn the Plow  
To peaceful Arts shall Envy Bow.  
A Riddle or the Cricket's Cry  
Is to Doubt a fit Reply.  
The Emmet's Inch & Eagle's Mile  
Make Lane Philosophy to smile.  
He who Doubts from what he sees  
Will ne'er Believe, do what you Please.  
If the Sun & Moon should doubt,  
They'd immediately Go out.  
To be in a Passion you Good may do,  
But no Good if a Passion is in you.  
The Whore & Gambler, by the State  
Licenc'd, build that Nation's Fate.  
The Harlot's cry from Street to Street  
Shall weave Old England's winding Sheet.  
The Winner's Shout, the Loser's Curse,  
Dance before dead England's Hearse.  
Every Night & every Morn  
Some to Misery are Born.  
Every Morn & every Night  
Some are Born to sweet delight.  
Some are Born to sweet delight,  
Some are Born to Endless Night.  
We are led to Believe a Lie  
When we see not Thro' the Eye  
Which was Born in a Night to perish in a Night  
When the Soul Slept in Beams of Light.  
God Appears & God is Light

To those poor Souls who dwell in Night,  
But does a Human Form Display  
To those who Dwell in Realms of day.

## THE GREY MONK

"I die, I diel" the Mother said,  
"My Children die for lack of Bread.  
What more has the merciless Tyrant said?"  
The Monk sat down on the Stony Bed.

The blood red ran from the Grey Monk's side,  
His hands & feet were wounded wide,  
His Body bent, his arms & knees  
Like to the roots of ancient trees.

His eye was dry; no tear could flow:  
A hollow groan first spoke his woe.  
He trembled & shudder'd upon the Bed;  
At length with a feeble cry he said:

"When God commanded this hand to write  
In the studious hours of deep midnight,  
He told me the writing I wrote should prove  
The Bane of all that on Earth I lov'd.

"My Brother starv'd between two Walls,  
His Children's Cry my Soul appalls;  
I mock'd at the wrack & griding chain,  
My bent body mocks their torturing pain.

"Thy Father drew his sword in the North,  
With his thousands strong he marched forth;

Thy Brother has arm'd himself in Steel  
To avenge the wrongs thy Children feel.

"But vain the Sword & vain the Bow,  
They never can work War's overthrow.  
The Hermit's Prayer & the Widow's tear  
Alone can free the World from fear.

"For a Tear is an Intellectual Thing,  
And a Sigh is the Sword of an Angel King,  
And the bitter groan of the Martyr's woe  
Is an Arrow from the Almighty's Bow.

"The hand of Vengeance found the Bed  
To which the Purple Tyrant fled;  
The iron hand crush'd the Tyrant's head  
And became a Tyrant in his stead."

LONG JOHN BROWN AND LITTLE  
MARY BELL

Little Mary Bell had a Fairy in a Nut,  
Long John Brown had the Devil in his Gut;  
Long John Brown lov'd Little Mary Bell,  
And the Fairy drew the Devil into the Nut-shell.

Her Fairy skip'd out & her Fairy Skip'd in;  
He laugh'd at the Devil saying "Love is a Sin."  
The Devil he raged & the Devil he was wroth,  
And the Devil enter'd into the Young Man's broth.

He was soon in the Gut of the loving Young Swain,  
For John eat & drank to drive away Love's pain;

But all he could do he grew thinner & thinner,  
Tho' he eat & drank as much as ten Men for his dinner.

Some said he had a Wolf in his stomach day & night,  
Some said he had the Devil & they guess'd right;  
The Fairy skip'd about in his Glory, Joy & Pride,  
And he laugh'd at the Devil till poor John Brown died.

Then the Fairy skip'd out of the old Nut shell,  
And woe & alack for Pretty Mary Bell!  
For the Devil crept in when the Fairy skip'd out,  
And there goes Miss Bell with her fusty old Nut.

#### WILLIAM BOND

I wonder whether the Girls are mad,  
And I wonder whether they mean to kill,  
And I wonder if William Bond will die,  
For assuredly he is very ill.

He went to Church in a May morning  
Attended by Fairies, one, two & three;  
But the Angels of Providence drove them away,  
And he return'd home in Misery.

He went not out to the Field nor Fold,  
He went not out to the Village nor Town,  
But he came home in a black, black cloud,  
And took to his Bed & there lay down.

And an Angel of Providence at his Feet,  
And an Angel of Providence at his Head,  
And in the midst a Black, Black Cloud,  
And in the midst the Sick Man on his Bed.

And on his Right hand was Mary Green,  
And on his Left hand was his Sister Jane,  
And their tears fell thro' the black, black Cloud  
To drive away the sick man's pain.

"O William, if thou dost another Love,  
Dost another Love better than poor Mary,  
Go & take that other to be thy Wife,  
And Mary Green shall her servant be."

"Yes, Mary, I do another Love,  
Another I Love far better than thee,  
And Another I will have for my Wife;  
Then what have I to do with thee?"

"For thou art Melancholy Pale,  
And on thy Head is the cold Moon's shine,  
But she is ruddy & bright as day,  
And the sun beams dazzle from her eyne."

Mary trembled & Mary chill'd  
And Mary fell down on the right hand floor,  
That William Bond & his Sister Jane  
Scarce could recover Mary more.

When Mary woke & found her Laid  
On the Right hand of her William dear,  
On the Right hand of his loved Bed,  
And saw her William Bond so near,

The Fairies that fled from William Bond  
Danced around her Shining Head;  
They danced over the Pillow white,  
And the Angels of Providence left the Bed.

I thought Love liv'd in the hot sun shine,  
But O, he lives in the Moony light!  
I thought to find Love in the heat of day,  
But sweet Love is the Comforter of Night.

Seek Love in the Pity of others' Woe,  
In the gentle relief of another's care,  
In the darkness of night & the winter's snow,  
In the naked & outcast, Seek Love there!

### THE SMILE

There is a Smile of Love,  
And there is a Smile of Deceit,  
And there is a Smile of Smiles  
In which these two Smiles meet.

And there is a Frown of Hate,  
And there is a Frown of Disdain,  
And there is a Frown of Frowns  
Which you strive to forget in vain,

For it sticks in the Heart's deep core  
And it sticks in the deep Back bone;  
And no Smile that ever was smil'd,  
But only one Smile alone,

That betwixt the Cradle & Grave  
It only once Smil'd can be;  
But, when it once is Smil'd,  
There's an end to all Misery.

## THE GOLDEN NET

Three Virgins at the break of day:  
"Whither, young Man, whither away?  
Alas for woe! alas for woe!"  
They cry, & tears for ever flow.  
The one was Cloth'd in flames of fire,  
The other Cloth'd in iron wire,  
The other Cloth'd in tears & sighs  
Dazling bright before my Eyes.  
They bore a Net of golden twine  
To hang upon the branches fine.  
Pitying I wept to see the woe  
That Love & Beauty undergo,  
To be consum'd in burning Fires  
And in ungratified desires,  
And in tears cloth'd Night & day  
Melted all my Soul away.  
When they saw my Tears, a Smile  
That did Heaven itself beguile,  
Bore the Golden Net aloft  
As on downy Pinions soft  
Over the Morning of my day.  
Underneath the Net I stray,  
Now intreating Burning Fire,  
Now intreating Iron Wire,  
Now intreating Tears & Sighs.  
O when will the morning rise?

## MARY

Sweet Mary, the first time she ever was there,  
Came into the Ball room among the Fair;  
The young Men & Maidens around her throng,  
And these are the words upon every tongue:

“An Angel is here from the heavenly climes,  
Or again does return the golden times;  
Her eyes outshine every brilliant ray,  
She opens her lips—’tis the Month of May.”

Mary moves in soft beauty & conscious delight  
To augment with sweet smiles all the joys of the Night,  
Nor once blushes to own to the rest of the Fair  
That sweet Love & Beauty are worthy our care.

In the Morning the Villagers rose with delight  
And repeated with pleasure the joys of the night,  
And Mary arose among Friends to be free,  
But no Friend from henceforward thou, Mary; shalt see.

Some said she was proud, some call’d her a whore,  
And some, when she passed by, shut to the door;  
A damp cold came o’er her, her blushes all fled;  
Her lillies & roses are blighted & shed.

“O, why was I born with a different Face?  
Why was I not born like this Envious Race?  
Why did Heaven adorn me with bountiful hand,  
And then set me down in an envious Land?”

"To be weak as a Lamb & smooth as a dove,  
And not to raise Envy, is call'd Christian Love;  
But if you raise Envy your Merit's to blame  
For planting such spite in the weak & the tame.

"I will humble my Beauty, I will not dress fine,  
I will keep from the Ball, & my Eyes shall not shine;  
And if any Girl's Lover forsakes her for me,  
I'll refuse him my hand & from Envy be free."

She went out in Morning attir'd plain & neat;  
"Proud Mary's gone Mad," said the Child in the Street;  
She went out in Morning in plain neat attire,  
And came home in Evening bespatter'd with mire.

She trembled & wept, sitting on the Bed side;  
She forgot it was Night, & she trembled & cried;  
She forgot it was Night, she forgot it was Morn,  
Her soft Memory imprinted with Faces of Scorn,

With Faces of Scorn & with Eyes of disdain  
Like foul Fiends inhabiting Mary's mild Brain;  
She remembers no Face like the Human Divine.  
All Faces have Envy, sweet Mary, but thine;

And thine is a Face of sweet Love in despair,  
And thine is a Face of mild sorrow & care,  
And thine is a Face of wild terror & fear  
That shall never be quiet till laid on its bier.

#### THE LAND OF DREAMS

Awake, awake, my little Boy!  
Thou wast thy Mother's only joy;

Why dost thou weep in thy gentle sleep?  
Awake! thy Father does thee keep.

“O, what Land is the Land of Dreams?  
What are its Mountains & what are its Streams?  
O Father, I saw my Mother there,  
Among the Lillies by waters fair.

“Among the Lambs, clothed in white,  
She walk’d with her Thomas in sweet delight.  
I wept for joy, like a dove I mourn;  
O! when shall I again return?”

Dear Child, I also by pleasant Streams  
Have wander’d all Night in the Land of Dreams;  
But tho’ calm & warm the waters wide,  
I could not get to the other side.

“Father, O Father! what do we here  
In this Land of unbelief & fear?  
The Land of Dreams is better far,  
Above the light of the Morning Star.”

DEDICATION OF THE ILLUSTRATIONS  
TO BLAIR’S GRAVE

TO THE QUEEN

The Door of Death is made of Gold,  
That Mortal Eyes cannot behold;  
But, when the Mortal Eyes are clos’d,  
And cold and pale the Limbs repos’d,  
The Soul awakes; and, wond’ring, sees  
In her mild Hand the golden Keys:

The Grave is Heaven's golden Gate,  
And rich and poor around it wait;  
O Shepherdess of England's Fold,  
Behold this Gate of Pearl and Gold!

To dedicate to England's Queen  
The Visions that my Soul has seen,  
And, by Her kind permission, bring  
What I have borne on solemn Wing  
From the vast regions of the Grave,  
Before Her Throne my Wings I wave;  
Bowing before my Sov'reign's Feet,  
"The Grave produc'd these Blossoms sweet  
In mild repose from Earthly strife;  
The Blossoms of Eternal Life!"

## §

If it is True, what the Prophets write,  
That the heathen Gods are all stocks & stones,  
Shall we, for the sake of being Polite,  
Feed them with the juice of our marrow bones?

And if Bezaleel & Aholiab drew  
What the Finger of God pointed to their View,  
Shall we suffer the Roman & Grecian Rods  
To compell us to worship them as Gods?

They stole them from the Temple of the Lord,  
And Worshipp'd them that they might make  
Inspired Art Abhor'r'd.

The Wood & Stone were call'd The Holy Things  
And their Sublime Intent given to their Kings,

All the Atonements of Jehovah spurn'd,  
And Criminals to Sacrifices Turn'd.

## §

Why was Cupid a Boy  
And why a boy was he?  
He should have been a Girl  
For ought that I can see.

For he shoots with his bow,  
And the Girl shoots with her Eye,  
And they both are merry & glad  
And laugh when we do cry.

And to make Cupid a Boy  
Was the Cupid Girl's mocking plan;  
For a boy can't interpret the thing  
Till he is become a man.

And then he's so pierc'd with cares  
And wounded with arrowy smarts,  
That the whole business of his life  
Is to pick out the heads of the darts.

'Twas the Greeks' love of war  
Turn'd Love into a Boy,  
And Woman into a Statue of Stone—  
And away flew every Joy.

## §

When a Man has Married a Wife, he finds out whether  
Her knees & elbows are only glewed together.

ON THE VIRGINITY OF THE VIRGIN MARY  
& JOHANNA SOUTHCOTT

Whate'er is done to her she cannot know,  
And if you'll ask her she will swear it so.  
Whether 'tis good or evil none's to blame:  
No one can take the pride, no one the shame.

## §

Grown old in Love from Seven till Seven times Seven,  
I oft have wish'd for Hell for Ease from Heaven.

## §

Since all the Riches of this World  
May be gifts from the Devil & Earthly Kings,  
I should suspect that I worship'd the Devil  
If I thank'd my God for Worldly things.

## §

Nail his neck to the Cross: nail it with a nail.  
Nail his neck to the Cross: ye all have power over his  
tail.

## §

The Caverns of the Grave I've seen,  
And these I shew'd to England's Queen.

But now the Caves of Hell I view:  
Who shall I dare to shew them to?  
What mighty Soul in Beauty's form  
Shall dauntless View the Infernal Storm?  
Egremont's Countess can controll  
The flames of Hell that round me roll.  
If she refuse, I still go on  
Till the Heavens & Earth are gone,  
Still admir'd by Noble minds,  
Follow'd by Envy on the winds,  
Re-engrav'd Time after Time,  
Ever in their youthful prime,  
My designs unchang'd remain.  
Time may rage but rage in vain.  
Far above Time's troubled Fountains  
On the Great Atlantic Mountains,  
In my Golden House on high,  
There they Shine Eternally.

## §

I rose up at the dawn of day—  
Get thee away! get thee away!  
Pray'st thou for Riches? away! away!  
This is the Throne of Mammon grey.

Said I, "This sure is very odd.  
I took it to be the Throne of God.  
For every Thing besides I have:  
It is only for Riches that I can crave.

"I have Mental Joy & Mental Health  
And Mental Friends & Mental wealth;

I've a Wife I love & that loves me;  
I've all but Riches Bodily.

"I am in God's presence night & day,  
And he never turns his face away.  
The accuser of sins by my side does stand  
"And he holds my money bag in his hand.

"For my worldly things God makes him pay,  
And he'd pay more if to him I would pray;  
And so you may do the worst you can do:  
Be assur'd Mr. devil I won't pray to you.

"Then If for Riches I must not Pray,  
God knows I little of Prayers need say.  
So as a Church is known by its Steeple,  
If I pray it must be for other People.

"He says, if I do not worship him for a God,  
I shall eat coarser food & go worse shod;  
So as I don't value such things as these,  
You must do, Mr. devil, just as God please."





*V.*

SELECTIONS  
FROM  
THE LETTERS





## LETTERS

### EDITOR'S NOTE

Blake's letters are no more personal than his other writing; he threw the full power of his personality, and its unawaking dream, into everything he did. But unlike so much of his other work, the letters show his encounter with the world. Here he is *in* the society he usually defied; it is one of the few glimpses we have of him in relation to others. Here Blake is not the lord of his own creations, a man always ready to console himself for the uniqueness of his thoughts by his own pleasure in them. He is a man talking to other men—reporting on the progress of work in hand, giving technical advice to interested craftsmen, inquiring after the health of a patron, hinting at the possibility of a sale. On occasion he is even ready to have a mutual conversation about his work, as from one man of good sense to another. He never adjusts his views to the correspondent's measure, but with the stiff and old-fashioned courtesy of his class, and out of his abundant good nature, shows himself a man ready for friendship.

Yet Blake had almost no friends; he had only admirers and enemies, patrons and colleagues. At the end, thanks to his young admirer John Linnell, there were even disciples. Friendship to him meant tolerance and encouragement of his work. The friends of his visions were his friends, and he was always ready to believe in another's

friendship where the usual skepticism or indifference was missing. He was touchingly grateful to anyone who took him seriously. "As to Myself, about whom you are so kindly interested, I live by miracle." When he is happy at a favor, he puts a poem into a letter. "Happiness stretch'd forth across the hills." It is not hard to believe that his happiness often did, when he felt the world would receive him. Yet these are primarily business letters. Blake was a man who never stopped thinking and working. A letter to him was the sixth finger of the hand which gave his message to the world.

Most of the letters are either to artists who befriended him—George Cumberland, John Flaxman the sculptor, Ozias Humphry, John Linnell; or to patrons like William Hayley and Thomas Butts. What is perhaps the greatest single letter, Blake's defense and exposition of his imagination to the Reverend John Trusler, beginning "I really am sorry that you are fallen out with the spiritual world," was written after the Reverend had expressed dissatisfaction with illustrations he had commissioned Blake to do for him. The nature of the Reverend Trusler's work may be guessed from the titles of two of his books—*Hogarth Moralized* and *The Way To Be Rich and Respectable*. When he received the letter he added, *Blake, dim'd with superstition.*

Thomas Butts (1759-1846), the great patron of Blake's middle period, was a wealthy and genial official who filled his house in Fitzroy Square with Blake's pictures. For many years he bought Blake's work regularly, sometimes taking a drawing a week, until he did not have room on his walls for more. Butts, though he was sometimes made uneasy by Blake's radicalism, thought well of him and tried in many ways to help him. At one period he engaged Blake to teach drawing to his son, Thomas, Junior. The Butts and Blake families got on

amiably, and Butts became one of the great supports of the artist's life. The son, however, thought so little of Blake's work that he sold the original "inventions" to *The Book of Job*, as well as many other pictures.

William Hayley (1745-1820), who seems in the end to have exasperated Blake more than anyone he ever knew, was a sentimental and interminable versifier, author of the popular *The Triumphs of Temper*, lives of Cowper and Romney, and endless memorials to himself and his illegitimate son, Thomas Alphonso. Hayley, from all reports, seems to have been one of the most notorious bores of the age: a sententious squire who delivered himself of poetic epistles on all subjects. Byron said that his work was "for ever feeble and for ever tame"; Blake's account of their relations portrays a sentimental and stubborn mediocrity who employed him for a variety of jobs but seems never to have understood the talent he exploited. It was Hayley who made possible Blake's three-year stay at the Felpham cottage, in Sussex. There Blake worked, with pathetic gratitude for a chance to live in the country, at illustrations to Hayley's life of Cowper and Hayley's *Ballads* ("Founded on Anecdotes Relating to Animals"), as well as many other tasks which he could finally no longer endure. One of his first commissions for Hayley was to decorate the library of the "Bard" with eighteen heads, nearly of life size, of the great poets—among them the bewept image of the son, Thomas Alphonso, encircled by doves. In the end Hayley's complacency and interference got so on Blake's nerves that he thought it better to return to London.

John Flaxman (1755-1826), one of the earliest and most important of Blake's artist friends, was one of the most important of eighteenth-century sculptors and designers, and as important to the art of his day as Blake was generally ignored by it. His delicate and "classical"

illustrations to Homer are probably his best work, but the churches of England are full of his memorials and monuments.

George Cumberland (the elder), was the author of *Thoughts on Outline*, which Blake helped to illustrate and one of the first proponents of the National Gallery. He was a devoted friend to Blake, and may have suggested the engraving technique that Blake developed into his unique method of "illuminated printing." The last engraving Blake ever did was a message card, or bookplate, for Cumberland.

Ozias Humphry (1742-1810), was one of the most famous of English miniature painters, and despite his own respectability, a great admirer of Blake's. Humphry obtained the commission from the Countess of Egremont that led to the tempera of *The Last Judgment*, described here in his letter of thanks to Humphry.

Richard Phillips, to whom Blake wrote a defense of his friend Fuseli's painting that became a characteristic attack on the painters of the period, was the editor of *The Monthly Magazine* and a bookseller.

John Linnell (1792-1882), a portrait and landscape painter, became the great support of Blake's old age, and introduced him to many young painters in the 1820's who admired and copied Blake. Linnell was one of Blake's most understanding and affectionate friends. He commissioned the illustrations to *The Book of Job* and the designs from *The Divine Comedy*, as well as a series of water-color drawings to *Paradise Regained* and other work. Linnell was so devoted to Blake that he wanted to name one of his sons after him. There is a fine letter by Linnell, written in 1830 to the Quaker poet, Bernard Barton, who had dedicated a sonnet to Linnell in gratitude for his kindness to Blake. Linnell

declined to accept the dedication, saying that he did not deserve it, and added of Blake: "I never in all my conversations with him could for a moment feel that there was the least justice in calling him insane; he could always explain his paradoxes satisfactorily when he pleased, but to many he spoke so that 'hearing they might *not* hear.' He was more like the ancient patterns of virtue than I ever expected to see in this world; he feared nothing so much as being rich, lest he should lose his spiritual riches."

## TO GEORGE CUMBERLAND

Lambeth

6 Decembr. 1795

DEAR SIR,

I congratulate you, not on any atchievement, because I know that the Genius that produces the Designs can execute them in any manner, notwithstanding the pretended Philosophy which teaches that Execution is the power of One & Invention of Another—Locke says it is the same faculty that Invents Judges, & I say he who can Invent can Execute.

As to laying on the Wax, it is as follows:

Take a cake of Virgin's Wax (I don't know what animal produces it) & stroke it regularly over the surface of a warm plate (the Plate must be warm enough to melt the Wax as it passes over), then immediately draw a feather over it & you will get an even surface which, when cold, will receive any impression minutely.

NOTE: The danger is in not covering the plate *all* over.

Now you will, I hope, shew all the family of Antique Bowers that Peace & Plenty & Domestic Happiness is the Source of Sublime Art, & prove to the Abstract Philosophers that Enjoyment & not Abstinence is the food of Intellect.

Yours sincerely,  
WILL BLAKE.

Health to Mrs. Cumberland & family.

The pressure necessary to roll off the lines is the same as when you print, or not quite so great. I have not been able to send a proof of the bath tho' I have done the corrections, my paper not being in order.

TO THE REV. DR. TRUSLER

Hercules Buildings, Lambeth,  
*Augst. 16, 1799.*

REV. SIR,

I find more & more that my Style of Designing is a Species by itself, & in this which I send you have been compell'd by my Genius or Angel to follow where he led; if I were to act otherwise it would not fulfil the purpose for which alone I live, which is, in conjunction with such men as my friend Cumberland, to renew the lost art of the Greeks.

I attempted every morning for a fortnight together to follow your Dictate, but when I found my attempts were in vain, resolv'd to shew an independence which I know will please an Author better than slavishly following the track of another, however admirable that track may be. At any rate, my Excuse must be: I could not do otherwise; it was out of my power!

I know I begged of you to give me your Ideas, & promised to build on them; here I counted without my host. I now find my mistake.

The Design I have sent Is:

A Father, taking leave of his Wife & Child, Is watch'd by Two Fiends incarnate, with intention that when his back is turned they will murder the mother & her infant. If this is not Malevolence with a vengeance, I have never seen it on Earth; & if you approve of this, I have no doubt of giving you Benevolence with Equal Vigor, as also Pride & Humility, but cannot previously describe in words what I mean to Design, for fear I should Evaporate the spirit of my Invention. But I hope that none of my Designs will be destitute of Infinite Particulars which will present themselves to the Contemplator. And tho' I call them Mine, I know that they are not Mine, being of the same opinion with Milton when he says That the Muse visits his slumbers & awakes & governs his song when Morn purples the East, & being also in the predicament of that prophet who says: "I cannot go beyond the command of "the Lord, to speak good or bad."

If you approve of my Manner, & it is agreeable to you, I would rather Paint Pictures in oil of the same dimensions than make Drawings, & on the same terms; by this means you will have a number of Cabinet pictures, which I flatter myself will not be unworthy of a scholar of Rembrandt & Teniers, whom I have studied no less than Rafael & Michaelangelo. Please to send me your orders respecting this, & In my next Effort I promise more Expedition.

- I am, Revd. Sir,

'Your very humble servt.

WILLM. BLAKE.

TO THE REV'D. DR. TRUSLER

13 Hercules Buildings,  
Lambeth,  
*August 23, 1799.*

REV'D. SIR,

I really am sorry that you are fall'n out with the Spiritual World, Especially if I should have to answer for it. I feel very sorry that your Ideas & Mine on Moral Painting differ so much as to have made you angry with my method of study. If I am wrong, I am wrong in good company. I had hoped your plan comprehended All Species of this Art, & Expecially that you would not regret that Species which gives Existence to Every other. namely, Visions of Eternity. You say that I want somebody to Elucidate my Ideas. But you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the Ancients consider'd what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction, because it rouzes the faculties to act. I name Moses, Solomon, Esop, Homer, Plato.

But as you have favor'd me with your remarks on my Design, permit me in return to defend it against a mistaken one, which is, That I have supposed Malevolence without a Cause. Is not Merit in one a Cause of Envy in another, & Serenity & Happiness & Beauty a Cause of Malevolence? But Want of Money & the Distress of A Thief can never be alleged as the Cause of his Thieving, for many honest people endure greater hardships with Fortitude. We must therefore seek the Cause elsewhere than in want of Money, for that is the Miser's passion, not the Thief's.

I have therefore proved your Reasonings Ill proportion'd, which you can never prove my figures to be; they are those of Michael Angelo, Rafael & the Antique, & of the best living Models. I percieve that your Eye is perveted by Caricature Prints, which ought not to abound so much as they do. Fun I love, but too much Fun is of all things the most loathsom. Mirth is better than Fun, & Happiness is better than Mirth. I feel that a Man may be happy in This World. And I know that This World Is a World of Imagination & Vision. I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike. To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is far more beautiful than the Sun, & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing which stands in the way. Some see Nature all Ridicule & Deformity, & by these I shall not regulate my proportions; & some scarce see Nature at all. But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, so he sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers. You certainly Mistake, when you say that the Visions of Fancy are not to be found in This World. To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination, & I feel Flatter'd when I am told so. What is it sets Homer, Virgil & Milton in so high a rank of Art? Why is the Bible more Entertaining & Instructive than any other book? Is it not because they are addressed to the Imagination, which is Spiritual Sensation, & but mediately to the Understanding or Reason? Such is True Painting, and such was alone valued by the Greeks & the best modern Artists. Consider what Lord Bacon says: "Sense sends over to Imagination before Reason have judged, & Reason sends over to Imagina-

tion before the Decree can be acted." See Advancemnt. of Learning, Part 2, P. 47 of first Edition.

But I am happy to find a Great Majority of Fellow Mortals who can Elucidate My Visions, & Particularly they have been Elucidated by Children, who have taken a greater delight in contemplating my Pictures than I even hoped. Neither Youth nor Childhood is Folly or Incapacity. Some Children are Fools & so are some Old Men. But There is a vast Majority on the side of Imagination or Spiritual Sensation.

To Engrave after another Painter is infinitely more laborious than to Engrave one's own Inventions. And of the size you require my price has been Thirty Guineas, & I cannot afford to do it for less. I had Twelve for the Head I sent you as a specimen; but after my own designs I could do at least Six times the quantity of labour in the same time, which will account for the difference of price as also that Chalk Engraving is at least six times as laborious as Aqua tinta. I have no objection to Engraving after another Artist. Engraving is the profession I was apprenticed to, & should never have attempted to live by anything else, If orders had not come in for my Designs & Paintings, which I have the pleasure to tell you are Increasing Every Day. Thus If I am a Painter it is not to be attributed to seeking after. But I am contented whether I live by Painting or Engraving.

I am, Revd. Sir, your very obedient servant,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

## TO GEORGE CUMBERLAND

Hercules Buildings,  
Lambeth,

Augst. 26, 1799.

DEAR CUMBERLAND,

I ought long ago to have written to you to thank you for your kind recommendation to Dr. Trusler, which, tho' it has fail'd of success, is not the less to be remember'd by me with Gratitude.

I have made him a Drawing in my best manner; he has sent it back with a Letter full of Criticisms, in which he says It accords not with his Intentions, which are to Reject all Fancy from his Work. How far he Expects to please, I cannot tell. But as I cannot paint Dirty rags & old shoes where I ought to place Naked Beauty or simple ornament, I despair of Ever pleasing one Class of Men. Unfortunately our authors of books are among this Class; how soon we shall have a change for the better I cannot Prophecy. Dr. Trusler says: "*Your Fancy*, from what I have seen of it, & I have seen variety at Mr. Cumberland's, seems to be in the other world, or the World of Spirits, which accords not with my Intentions, which, whilst living in This World, Wish to follow *the Nature of it*." I could not help smiling at the difference between the doctrines of Dr. Trusler & those of Christ. But, however, for his own sake I am sorry that a Man should be so enamour'd of Rowlandson's caricatures as to call them copies from life & manners, or fit Things for a Clergyman to write upon.

Pray let me intreat you to persevere in your Designing; it is the only source of Pleasure. All your other pleasures depend upon It. It is the Tree; your Pleasures

are the Fruit. Your Inventions of Intellectual Visions are the Stamina of every thing you value. Go on, if not for your own sake, yet for ours, who love & admire your works; but, above all, For the Sake of the Arts. Do not throw aside for any long time the honour intended you by Nature to revive the Greek workmanship. I study your outlines as usual, just as if they were antiques.

As to Myself, about whom you are so kindly Interested, I live by Miracle. I am Painting small Pictures from the Bible. For as to Engraving, in which art I cannot reproach myself with any neglect, yet I am laid by in a corner as if I did not Exist, & since my Young's Night Thoughts have been publish'd, Even Johnson & Fuseli have discarded my Graver. But as I know that he who Works & has his health cannot starve, I laugh at Fortune & Go on & on. I think I foresee better Things than I have ever seen. My Work pleases my employer, & I have an order for Fifty small Pictures at one Guinea each, which is something better than mere copying after another artist. But above all, I feel myself happy & contented let what will come; having passed now near twenty years in ups & downs, I am used to them, & perhaps a little practise in them may turn out to benefit. It is now Exactly Twenty years since I was upon the ocean of business, & tho' [I] laugh at Fortune, I am perswaded that She Alone is the Governor of Worldly Riches, & when it is Fit she will call on me; till then I wait with Patience, in hopes that She is busied among my Friends.

With Mine & My Wife's best compliments to Mrs. Cumberland, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

WILLM. BLAKE.

## TO WILLIAM HAYLEY

Lambeth,  
*May 6, 1800.*

DEAR SIR,

I am very sorry for your immense loss, which is a repetition of what all feel in this valley of misery and happiness mixed. I send the shadow of the departed angel, and hope the likeness is improved. The lips I have again lessened as you advise, and done a good many other softenings to the whole. I know that our deceased friends are more really with us than when they were apparent to our mortal part. Thirteen years ago I lost a brother, and with his spirit I converse daily and hourly in the spirit, and see him in my remembrance, in the regions of my imagination. I hear his advice, and even now write from his dictate. Forgive me for expressing to you my enthusiasm, which I wish all to partake of, since it is to me a source of immortal joy, even in this world. By it I am the companion of angels. May you continue to be so more and more; and to be more and more persuaded that every mortal loss is an immortal gain. The ruins of Time build mansions in Eternity.

I have also sent a proof of *Pericles* for your remarks, thanking you for the kindness with which you express them, and feeling heartily your grief with a brother's sympathy.

I remain,  
Dear Sir,  
Your humble servant,  
WILLIAM BLAKE.

## TO GEORGE CUMBERLAND

13, Hercules Buildings, Lambeth.  
2, *July*, 1800.

DEAR CUMBERLAND,

I have to congratulate you on your plan for a National Gallery being put into Execution. All your wishes shall in due time be fulfilled; the immense flood of Grecian light & glory which is coming on Europe will more than realize our warmest wishes. Your honours will be unbounded when your plan shall be carried into Execution as it must be if England continues a Nation. I hear that it is now in the hands of Ministers, That the King shews it great Countenance & Encouragement, that it will soon be before Parliament, & that it *must* be extended & enlarged to take in Originals both of Painting & Sculpture by considering every valuable original that is brought into England or can be purchased Abroad as its objects of Acquisition. Such is the Plan as I am told & such must be the plan if England wishes to continue at all worth notice; as you have yourself observ'd only now, we must possess Originals as well as France or be Nothing.

Excuse, I intreat you, my not returning Thanks at the proper moment for your kind present. No perswasion could make my stupid head believe that it was proper for me to trouble you with a letter of meer compliment & Expression of thanks. I begin to Emerge from a deep pit of Melancholy, Melancholy without any real reason for it, a Disease which God keep you from & all good men. Our artists of all ranks praise your outlines &

wish for more. Flaxman is very warm in your commendation & more and more of A Grecian. Mr. Hayley has lately mentioned your work on outline in Notes to an Essay on Sculpture in Six Epistles to John Flaxman. I have been too little among friends which I fear they will not Excuse & I know not how to apologize for. Poor Fuseli, sore from the lash of Envious tongues, praises you & dispraises with the same breath; he is not naturally good natured, but he is artificially very ill natured, yet even from him I learn the Estimation you are held in among artists & connoisseurs.

I am still Employ'd in making Designs & little Pictures with now & then an Engraving & find that in future to live will not be so difficult as it has been. It is very Extraordinary that London in so few years from a city of meer Necessaries or at l[e]ast a commerce of the lowest order of luxuries should have become a City of Elegance in some degree & that its once stupid inhabitants should enter into an Emulation of Grecian manners. There are now, I believe, as many Booksellers as there are Butchers & as many Printshops as of any other trade. We remember when a Print shop was a rare bird in London & I myself remember when I thought my pursuits of Art a kind of criminal dissipation & neglect of the main chance, which I hid my face for not being able to abandon as a Passion which is forbidden by Law & Religion, but now it appears to be Law & Gospel too, at least I hear so from the few friends I have dared to visit in my stupid Melancholy. Excuse this communication of sentiments which I felt necessary to my repose at this time. I feel very strongly that I neglect my Duty to my Friends but It is not want of Gratitude or Friendship but perhaps an Excess of both.

Let me hear of your welfare. Remember My & My

Wife's Respectful Compliments to Mrs. Cumberland &  
Family

& believe me to be for Ever

Yours

WILLIAM BLAKE.

### TO JOHN FLAXMAN

MY DEAREST FRIEND,

It is to you I owe All my present Happiness. It is to you I owe perhaps the Principal Happiness of my life. I have presum'd on your friendship in staying so long away & not calling to know of your welfare, but hope now every thing is nearly completed for our removal to Felpham, that I shall see you on Sunday, as we have appointed Sunday afternoon to call on Mrs. Flaxman at Hampstead. I send you a few lines, which I hope you will Excuse. And As the time is arriv'd when Men shall again converse in Heaven & walk with Angels, I know you will be pleased with the Intention, & hope you will forgive the Poetry.

To My Dearest Friend, John Flaxman, these lines:

I bless thee, O Father of Heaven & Earth, that ever I saw  
Flaxman's face.  
Angels stand round my Spirit in Heaven, the blessed of  
Heaven are my friends upon Earth.  
When Flaxman was taken to Italy, Fuseli was given to me  
for a season,  
And now Flaxman hath given me Hayley his friend to be  
mine, such my lot upon Earth.  
Now my lot in the Heavens is this, Milton lov'd me in child-  
hood & shew'd me his face.  
Ezra came with Isaiah the Prophet, but Shakespeare in ripper  
years gave me his hand;

Paracelsus & Behmen appear'd to me, terrors appear'd in  
 the Heavens above  
 And in Hell beneath, & a mighty & awful change threatened  
 the Earth.  
 The American War began. All its dark horrors passed before  
 my face  
 Across the Atlantic to France. Then the French Revolution  
 commenc'd in thick clouds,  
 And My Angels have told me that seeing such visions I  
 could not subsist on the Earth,  
 But by my conjunction with Flaxman, who knows to for-  
 give Nervous Fear.

I remain, for Ever Yours,                      WILLIAM BLAKE.

Be so kind as to Read & then seal the Inclosed & send  
 it on its much beloved Mission.

TO MRS. FLAXMAN<sup>1</sup>

H B, Lambeth,  
 14 Sept. 1800.

MY DEAREST FRIEND,

I hope you will not think we could forget your Services to us, or any way neglect to love & remember with affection even the hem of your garment; we indeed presume on your kindness in neglecting to have call'd on you since my Husband's first return from Felpham. We have been incessantly busy in our great removal; but can never think of going without first paying our proper duty to you & Mr. Flaxman. We intend to call on Sunday afternoon in Hampstead, to take farewell, All things being now nearly completed for our setting forth on Tuesday Morning; it is only Sixty Miles, & Lambeth was One Hundred, for the terrible desart of London

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<sup>1</sup> Written by Catherine Blake.

was between. My husband has been obliged to finish several things necessary to be finished before our migration; the Swallows call us, fleeting past our window at this moment. O how we delight in talking of the pleasure we shall have in preparing you a summer bower at Felpham, & we not only talk, but behold! the Angels of our journey have inspired a song to you:

To My Dear Friend, Mrs. Anna Flaxman.

This Song to the flower of Flaxman's joy,  
To the blossom of hope, for a sweet decoy:  
Do all that you can or all that you may,  
To entice him to Felpham & far away:

Away to Sweet Felpham, for Heaven is there;  
The Ladder of Angels descends thro' the air;  
On the Turret its spiral does softly descend,  
Thro' the village then winds, at My Cot it does end.

You stand in the village & look up to heaven;  
The precious stones glitter on flights seventy seven;  
And My Brother is there, & My Friend & Thine  
Descend & ascend with the Bread & the Wine.

The Bread of sweet Thought & the Wine of Delight  
Feeds the Village of Felpham by day & by night;  
And at his own door the bless'd Hermit does stand,  
Dispensing, Unceasing, to all the whole Land.

W. BLAKE.

Recieve my & my husband's love & affection, & believe  
me to be Yours affectionately,

CATHERINE BLAKE.

TO JOHN FLAXMAN

Felpham,

*Sept. 21, 1800, Sunday Morning.*

DEAR SCULPTOR OF ETERNITY,

We are safe arrived at our Cottage, which is more beautiful than I thought it, & more convenient. It is a perfect Model for Cottages &, I think, for Palaces of Magnificence, only Enlarging, not altering its proportions, & adding ornaments & not principals. Nothing can be more Grand than its Simplicity & Usefulness. Simple without Intricacy, it seems to be the Spontaneous Effusion of Humanity, congenial to the wants of Man. No other formed House can ever please me so well; nor shall I ever be perswaded, I believe, that it can be improved either in Beauty or Use.

Mr. Hayley recieved us with his usual brotherly affection. I have begun to work. Felpham is a sweet place for Study, because it is more Spiritual than London. Heaven opens here on all sides her golden Gates; her windows are not obstructed by vapours; voices of Celestial inhabitants are more distinctly heard, & their forms more distinctly seen; & my Cottage is also a Shadow of their houses. My Wife & Sister are both well, courting Neptune for an embrace.

Our Journey was very pleasant; & tho' we had a great deal of Luggage, No Grumbling; All was Chearfulness & Good Humour on the Road, & yet we could not arrive at our Cottage before half past Eleven at night, owing to the necessary shifting of our Luggage from one Chaise to another; for we had Seven Different Chaises, & as many different drivers. We set out between Six & Seven in the Morning of Thursday, with Sixteen heavy

boxes & portfolios full of prints. And Now Begins a New life, because another covering of Earth is shaken off. I am more famed in Heaven for my works than I could well conceive. In my Brain are studies & Chambers filled with books & pictures of old, which I wrote & painted in ages of Eternity before my mortal life; & those works are the delight & Study of Archangels. Why, then, should I be anxious about the riches or fame of mortality? The Lord our father will do for us & with us according to his divine will for our Good.

You, O dear Flaxman, are a Sublime Archangel, My Friend & Companion from Eternity; in the Divine bosom is our dwelling place. I look back into the regions of Reminiscence & behold our ancient days before this Earth appear'd in its vegetated mortality to my mortal vegetated Eyes. I see our houses of Eternity, which can never be separated, tho' our Mortal vehicles should stand at the remotest corners of heaven from each other.

Farewell, My Best Friend! Remember Me & My Wife in Love & Friendship to our Dear Mrs. Flaxman, whom we ardently desire to Entertain beneath our thatched roof of rusted gold, & believe me for ever to remain

Your Grateful & Affectionate,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

#### TO THOMAS BUTTS

DEAR FRIEND OF MY ANGELS,

We are safe arrived at our Cottage without accident or hindrance, tho' it was between Eleven & Twelve o'clock at night before we could get home, owing to the necessary shifting of our boxes & portfolios from one Chaise to another. We had Seven different Chaises & as many different drivers. All upon the road was chearful-

ness & welcome; tho' our luggage was very heavy there was no grumbling at all. We travel'd thro' a most beautiful country on a most glorious day. Our Cottage is more beautiful than I thought it, & also more convenient, for tho' small it is well proportion'd, & if I should ever build a Palace it would be only My Cottage Enlarged. Please to tell Mrs. Butts that we have dedicated a Chamber for her service, & that it has a very fine view of the Sea. Mr. Hayley reciev'd me with his usual brotherly affection. My Wife & Sister are both very well, & courting Neptune for an Embrace, whose terrors this morning made them afraid, but whose mildness is often Equal to his terrors. The villagers of Felpham are not meer Rustics, they are polite & modest. Meat is cheaper than in London, but the sweet air & the voices of winds, trees & birds, & the odours of the happy ground, makes it a dwelling for immortals. Work will go on here with God speed.—A roller & two harrows lie before my window. I met a plow on my first going out at my gate the first morning after my arrival, & the Plowboy said to the Plowman, "Father, The Gate is Open." I have begun to Work, & find that I can work with greater pleasure than ever. Hope soon to give you a proof that Felpham is propitious to the Arts.

God bless you! I shall wish for you on Tuesday Evening as usual. Pray give My & My wife & sister's love & respects to Mrs. Butts; accept them yourself, & believe me, for ever,

Your affectionate & obliged Friend,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

My Sister will be in town in a week, & bring with her your account & whatever else I can finish.

Direct to Me:

Blake, Felpham, near Chichester, Sussex.

## TO THOMAS BUTTS

Felpham, *Octr. 2d 1800.*

FRIEND OF RELIGION & ORDER,

I thank you for your very beautiful & encouraging Verses, which I account a Crown of Laurels, & I also thank you for your reprehension of follies by me foster'd. Your prediction will, I hope, be fulfilled in me, & in future I am the determined advocate of Religion & Humility, the two bands of Society. Having been so full of the Business of Settling the sticks & feathers of my nest, I have not got any forwarder with "the three Marys" or with any other of your commissions; but hope, now I have commenced a new life of industry, to do credit to that new life by Improved Works. Recieve from me a return of verses, such as Felpham produces by me, tho' not such as she produces by her Eldest Son; however, such as they are, I cannot resist the temptation to send them to you.

To my Friend Butts I write  
My first Vision of Light,  
On the yellow sands sitting.  
The Sun was Emitting  
His Glorious beams  
From Heaven's high Streams.  
Over Sea, over Land  
My Eyes did Expand  
Into regions of air  
Away from all Care,  
Into regions of fire  
Remote from Desire;  
The Light of the Morning  
Heaven's Mountains adorning:  
In particles bright  
The jewels of Light

Distinct shone & clear.  
Amaz'd & in fear  
I each particle gazed,  
Astonish'd, Amazed;  
For each was a Man  
Human-form'd. Swift I ran,  
For they beckon'd to me  
Remote by the Sea,  
Saying: "Each grain of Sand,  
Every Stone on the Land,  
Each rock & each hill,  
Each fountain & rill,  
Each herb & each tree,  
Mountain, hill, earth & sea,  
Cloud, Meteor & Star,  
Are Men seen Afar."  
I stood in the Streams  
Of Heaven's bright beams,  
And Saw Felpham sweet  
Beneath my bright feet  
In soft Female charms;  
And in her fair arms  
My Shadow I knew  
And my wife's shadow too,  
And My Sister & Friend.  
We like Infants descend  
In our Shadows on Earth,  
Like a weak mortal birth.  
My Eyes more and more  
Like a Sea without shore  
Continue Expanding,  
The Heavens commanding,  
Till the Jewels of Light,  
Heavenly Men beaming bright,  
Appear'd as One Man,  
Who complacent began  
My limbs to infold  
In his beams of bright gold;  
Like dross purg'd away  
All my mire & my clay.  
Soft consum'd in delight  
In his bosom Sun bright  
I remain'd. Soft he smil'd,

And I heard his voice Mild  
 Saying: "This is My Fold,  
 O thou Ram horn'd with gold,  
 Who awakest from Sleep  
 On the Sides of the Deep.  
 On the Mountains around  
 The roarings resound  
 Of the lion & wolf,  
 The loud Sea & deep gulf.  
 These are guards of My Fold,  
 O thou Ram horn'd with gold!"  
 And the voice faded mild.  
 I remain'd as a Child;  
 All I ever had known  
 Before me bright Shone.  
 I saw you & your wife  
 By the fountains of Life.  
 Such the Vision to me  
 Appear'd on the sea.

Mrs. Butts will, I hope, Excuse my not having finish'd the Portrait. I wait for less hurried moments. Our Cottage looks more & more beautiful. And tho' the weather is wet, the Air is very Mild, much Milder than it was in London when we came away. Chichester is a very handsome City, Seven miles from us; we can get most Conveniences there. The Country is not so destitute of accomodations to our wants as I expected it would be. We have had but little time for viewing the Country, but what we have seen is Most Beautiful, & the People are Genuine Saxons, handsomer than the people about London. Mrs. Butts will Excuse the following lines:

To Mrs. Butts.

Wife of the Friend of those I most revere,  
 Receive this tribute from a Harp sincere;  
 Go on in Virtuous Seed sowing on Mold  
 Of Human Vegetation, & Behold

Your Harvest Springing to Eternal Life,  
Parent of Youthful Minds, & happy Wife!

W.B.

I am for Ever Yours,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY

Felpham, 26th November 1800.

DEAR SIR,

Absorbed by the poets Milton, Homer, Camoens, Er-cilla, Ariosto, and Spenser, whose physiognomies have been my delightful study, *Little Tom* has been of late unattended to, and my wife's illness not being quite gone off, she has not printed any more since you went to London. But we can muster a few in colours and some in black, which I hope will be no less favour'd, tho' they are rough like rough sailors. We mean to begin printing again to-morrow. Time flies very fast and very merrily. I sometimes try to be miserable that I may do more work, but find it is a foolish experiment. Happinesses have wings and wheels; miseries are leaden legged, and their whole employment is to clip the wings and to take off the wheels of our chariots. We determine, therefore, to be happy and do all that we can, tho' not all that we would. Our dear friend Flaxman is the theme of my emulation in this of industry, as well as in other virtues and merits. Gladly I hear of his full health and spirits. Happy son of the immortal Phidias, his lot is truly glorious, and mine no less happy in his friendship and in that of his friends. Our cottage is surrounded by the same guardians you left with us; they keep off every wind. We hear the west howl at a distance, the south bounds on high over our thatch, and smiling on our cottage say:

"You lay too low for my anger to injure." As to the east and north, I believe they cannot get past the Turret.

My wife joins with me in duty and affection to you. Please to remember us both in love to Mr. and Mrs. Flaxman, and

believe me to be your affectionate,

Enthusiastic, hope fostered visionary,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

#### TO THOMAS BUTTS

Felpham Cottage, of Cottages the prettiest,  
*September 11, 1801.*

MY DEAR SIR,

I hope you will continue to excuse my want of steady perseverance, by which want I am still so much your debtor & you so much my Credit-er; but such as I can be, I will. I can be grateful, & I can soon Send you some of your designs which I have nearly completed. In the mean time by my Sister's hands I transmit to Mrs. Butts an attempt at your likeness, which I hope she, who is the best judge, will think like. Time flies faster (as seems to me) here than in London. I labour incessantly & accomplish not one half of what I intend, because my Abstract folly hurries me often away while I am at work, carrying me over Mountains & Valleys, which are not Real, in a Land of Abstraction where Spectres of the Dead wander. This I endeavour to prevent & with my whole might chain my feet to the world of Duty & Reality; but in vain! the faster I bind, the better is the Ballast, for I, so far from being bound down, take the world with me in my flights, & often it seems lighter than a ball of wool rolled by the wind. Bacon & Newton would prescribe ways of making the world heavier to me, &

Pitt would prescribe distress for a medicinal potion; but as none on Earth can give me Mental Distress, & I know that all Distress inflicted by Heaven is a Mercy, a Fig for all Corporeal! Such Distress is My mock & scorn. Alas! wretched, happy, ineffectual labourer of time's moments that I am! who shall deliver me from this Spirit of Abstraction & Improvidence? Such, my Dear Sir, Is the truth of my state, & I tell it you in palliation of my seeming neglect of your most pleasant orders; but I have not neglected them; & yet a Year is rolled over, & only now I approach the prospect of sending you some, which you may expect soon. I should have sent them by My Sister, but, as the Coach goes three times a week to London & they will arrive as safe as with her, I shall have the opportunity of inclosing several together which are not yet completed. I thank you again & again for your generous forbearance, of which I have need—and now I must express my wishes to see you at Felpham & to shew you Mr. Hayley's Library, which is still unfinished, but is in a finishing way & looks well. I ought also to mention my Extreme disappointment at Mr. Johnson's forgetfulness, who appointed to call on you but did Not. He is also a happy Abstract, known by all his Friends as the most innocent forgetter of his own Interests. He is nephew to the late Mr. Cowper the Poet; you would like him much. I continue painting Miniatures & Improve more & more, as all my friends tell me; but my Principal labour at this time is Engraving Plates for Cowper's Life, a Work of Magnitude, which Mr. Hayley is now labouring with all his matchless industry, & which will be a most valuable acquisition to Literature, not only on account of Mr. Hayley's composition, but also as it will contain Letters of Cowper to his friends, Perhaps, or rather Certainly, the very best letters that ever were published.

My wife joins with me in Love to you & Mrs. Butts, hoping that her joy is now increased, & yours also, in an increase of family & of health & happiness.

I remain, Dear Sir,

Ever Yours Sincerely,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

Next time I have the happiness to see you, I am determined to paint another Portrait of you from Life in my best manner, for Memory will not do in such minute operations; for I have now discover'd that without Nature before the painter's Eye, he can never produce any thing in the walks of Natural Painting. Historical Designing is one thing & Portrait Painting another, & they are as Distinct as any two Arts can be. Happy would that Man be who could unite them!

*P.S.* Please to Remember our best respects to Mr. Birch, & tell him that Felpham Men are the mildest of the human race; if it is the will of Providence, they shall be the wisest. We hope that he will, next summer, joke us face to face.—God bless you all!

TO JOHN FLAXMAN

*Oct 19, 1801.*

DEAR FLAXMAN,

I rejoice to hear that your Great Work is accomplished. Peace opens the way to greater still. The Kingdoms of this World are now become the Kingdoms of God & His Christ, & we shall reign with him for ever & ever. The Reign of Literature & the Arts commences. Blessed are those who are found studious of Literature & Humane & polite accomplishments. Such have their lamps burning & such shall shine as the stars.

Mr. Thomas, your friend to whom you was so kind as to make honourable mention of me, has been at Felp-ham & did me the favor to call on me. I have promis'd him to send my designs for Comus when I have done them, directed to you.

Now I hope to see the Great Works of Art, as they are so near to Felpham: Paris being scarce further off than London. But I hope that France & England will henceforth be as One Country and their Arts One, & that you will ere long be erecting Monuments In Paris—Emblems of Peace.

My wife joins with me in love to You & Mrs. Flaxman.

I remain, Yours Sincerely

WILLIAM BLAKE.

I have just seen Weller.—all y'r friends in the North are willing to await y'r leisure for Works of Marble, but Weller says it would soothe & comfort the good sister of the upright Mr. D. to see a little sketch from y'r hand. Adio.

#### TO THOMAS BUTTS

Felpham,  
*Jany. 10, 1802.*

DEAR SIR,

Your very kind & affectionate Letter & the many kind things you have said in it, call'd upon me for an immediate answer; but it found My Wife & Myself so Ill, & My wife so very ill, that till now I have not been able to do this duty. The Ague & Rheumatism have been almost her constant Enemies, which she has combated in vain ever since we have been here; & her sickness is always my sorrow, of course. But what you tell me about

your sight afflicted me not a little, & that about your health, in another part of your letter, makes me intreat you to take due care of both; it is a part of our duty to God & man to take due care of his Gifts; & tho' we ought not [to] think *more* highly of ourselves, yet we ought to think As highly of ourselves as immortals ought to think.

When I came down here, I was more sanguine than I am at present; but it was because I was ignorant of many things which have since occurred, & chiefly the unhealthiness of the place. Yet I do not repent of coming on a thousand accounts; & Mr. H., I doubt not, will do ultimately all that both he & I wish—that is, to lift me out of difficulty; but this is no easy matter to a man who, having Spiritual Enemies of such formidable magnitude, cannot expect to want natural hidden ones.

Your approbation of my pictures is a Multitude to Me, & I doubt not that all your kind wishes in my behalf shall in due time be fulfilled. Your kind offer of pecuniary assistance I can only thank you for at present, because I have enough to serve my present purpose here; our expenses are small, & our income, from our incessant labour, fully adequate to them at present. I am now engaged in Engraving 6 small plates for a New Edition of Mr. Hayley's Triumphs of Temper, from drawings by Maria Flaxman, sister to my friend the Sculptor, and it seems that other things will follow in course, if I do but Copy these well; but Patience! if Great things do not turn out, it is because such things depend on the Spiritual & not on the Natural World; & if it was fit for me, I doubt not that I should be Employ'd in Greater things; & when it is proper, my Talents shall be properly exercised in Public, as I hope they are now in private; for, till then, I leave no stone unturn'd & no path unexplor'd that lends to improvement in my beloved Arts. One thing of real consequence I have accomplish'd by com-

ing into the country, which is to me consolation enough: namely, I have recollected all my scatter'd thoughts on Art & resumed my primitive & original ways of Execution in both painting & engraving, which in the confusion of London I had very much lost & obliterated from my mind. But whatever becomes of my labours, I would rather that they should be preserv'd in your Green House (not, as you mistakenly call it, dunghill) than in the cold gallery of fashion.—The Sun may yet shine, & then they will be brought into open air.

But you have so generously & openly desired that I will divide my griefs with you, that I cannot hide what it is now become my duty to explain.—My unhappiness has arisen from a source which, if explor'd too narrowly, might hurt my pecuniary circumstances, As my dependence is on Engraving at present, & particularly on the Engravings I have in hand for Mr. H.: & I find on all hands great objections to my doing anything but the meer drudgery of business, & intimations that if I do not confine myself to this, I shall not live; this has always pursu'd me. You will understand by this the source of all my uneasiness. This from Johnson & Fuseli brought me down here, & this from Mr. H. will bring me back again; for that I cannot live without doing my duty to lay up treasures in heaven is Certain & Determined, & to this I have long made up my mind, & why this should be made an objection to Me, while Drunkenness, Lewdness, Gluttony & even Idleness itself, does not hurt other men, let Satan himself Explain. The Thing I have most at Heart—more than life, or all that seems to make life comfortable without—Is the Interest of True Religion & Science, & whenever any thing appears to affect that Interest (Especially if I myself omit any duty to my Station as a Soldier of Christ), It gives me the greatest of torments. I am not ashamed, afraid, or averse to tell you

what Ought to be Told: That I am under the direction of Messengers from Heaven, Daily & Nightly; but the nature of such things is not, as some suppose, without trouble or care. Temptations are on the right hand & left; behind, the sea of time & space roars & follows swiftly; he who keeps not right onward is lost, & if our footsteps slide in clay, how can we do otherwise than fear & tremble? but I should not have troubled You with this account of my spiritual state, unless it had been necessary in explaining the actual cause of my uneasiness, into which you are so kind as to Enquire; for I never obtrude such things on others unless question'd, & then I never disguise the truth.—But if we fear to do the dictates of our Angels, & tremble at the Tasks set before us; if we refuse to do Spiritual Acts because of Natural Fears or Natural Desires! Who can describe the dismal torments of such a state!—I too well remember the Threats I heard!—"If you, who are organised by Divine Providence for spiritual communion, Refuse, & bury your Talent in the Earth, even tho' you should want Natural Bread, Sorrow & Desperation pursues you thro' life, & after death shame & confusion of face to eternity. Every one in Eternity will leave you, aghast at the Man who was crown'd with glory & honour by his brethren, & betray'd their cause to their enemies. You will be call'd the base Judas who betray'd his Friend!"—Such words would make any stout man tremble, & how then could I be at ease? But I am now no longer in That State, & now go on again with my Task, Fearless, and tho' my path is difficult, I have no fear of stumbling while I keep it.

My wife desires her kindest Love to Mrs. Butts, & I have permitted her to send it to you also; we often wish that we could unite again in Society, & hope that the

time is not distant when we shall do so, being determin'd not to remain another winter here, but to return to London.

'I hear a voice you cannot hear, that says I must not stay,  
I see a hand you cannot see, that beckons me away.'

Naked we came here, naked of Natural things, & naked we shall return; but while cloth'd with the Divine Mercy, we are richly cloth'd in Spiritual & suffer all the rest gladly. Pray give my Love to Mrs. Butts & your family. I am, Yours Sincerely,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

P.S. Your Obliging proposal of Exhibiting my two Pictures likewise calls for my thanks; I will finish the other, & then we shall judge of the matter with certainty.

#### TO THOMAS BUTTS

Felpham, *Novr.* 22, 1802.

DEAR SIR,

My Brother tells me that he fears you are offended with me. I fear so too, because there appears some reason why you might be so. But when you have heard me out, you will not be so.

I have now given two years to the intense study of those parts of the art which relate to light & shade & colour, & am Convinc'd that either my understanding is incapable of comprehending the beauties of Colouring, or the Pictures which I painted for you Are Equal in Every part of the Art, & superior in One, to any thing

that has been done since the age of Rafael.—All Sr. J. Reynolds's discourses to the Royal Academy will shew that the Venetian finesse in Art can never be united with the Majesty of Colouring necessary to Historical beauty; & in a letter to the Revd. Mr. Gilpin, author of a work on Picturesque Scenery, he says Thus: "It may be worth consideration whether the epithet Picturesque is not applicable to the excellencies of the inferior Schools rather than to the higher. The works of Michael Angelo, Rafael, &c., appear to me to have nothing of it: whereas Rubens & the Venetian Painters may also be said to have Nothing Else.—Perhaps Picturesque is somewhat synonymous to the word Taste, which we should think improperly applied to Homer or Milton, but very well to Prior or Pope. I suspect that the application of these words are to Excellencies of an inferior order, & which are incompatible with the Grand Style. You are certainly right in saying that variety of Tints & Forms is Picturesque; but it must be remember'd, on the other hand, that the reverse of this (*uniformity of Colour & a long continuation of lines*) produces Grandeur."—So says Sir Joshua, and so say I; for I have now proved that the parts of the art which I neglected to display in those little pictures & drawings which I had the pleasure & profit to do for you, are incompatible with the designs.—There is nothing in the Art which our Painters do that I can confess myself ignorant of. I also Know & Understand & can assuredly affirm, that the works I have done for you are Equal to Carrache or Rafael (and I am now seven years older than Rafael was when he died), I say they are Equal to Carrache or Rafael, or Else I am Blind, Stupid, Ignorant and Incapable in two years' Study to understand those things which a Boarding school Miss can comprehend in a fortnight. Be assured,

My dear Friend, that there is not one touch in those Drawings & Pictures but what came from my Head & my Heart in Unison; That I am Proud of being their Author and Grateful to you my Employer; & that I look upon you as the Chief of my Friends, whom I would endeavour to please, because you, among all men, have enabled me to produce these things. I would not send you a Drawing or a Picture till I had again reconsider'd my notions of Art, & had put myself back as if I was a learner. I have proved that I am Right, & shall now Go on with the Vigour I was in my Childhood famous for.

But I do not pretend to be Perfect: but, if my Works have faults, Carrache, Corregio, & Rafael's have faults also; let me observe that the yellow leather flesh of old men, the ill drawn & ugly young women, &, above all, the dawbed black & yellow shadows that are found in most fine, ay, & the finest pictures, I altogether reject as ruinous to Effect, tho' Connoisseurs may think otherwise.

Let me also notice that Carrache's Pictures are not like Correggio's, nor Correggio's like Rafael's; &, if neither of them was to be encouraged till he did like any of the others, he must die without Encouragement. My Pictures are unlike any of these Painters, & I would have them to be so. I think the manner I adopt More Perfect than any other; no doubt They thought the same of theirs.

You will be tempted to think that, as I improve, The Pictures, &c., that I did for you are not what I would now wish them to be. On this I beg to say That they are what I intended them, & that I know I never shall do better; for, if I were to do them over again, they would lose as much as they gain'd, because they were done in the heat of my Spirits.

But you will justly enquire why I have not written all this time to you? I answer I have been very Unhappy, & could not think of troubling you about it, or any of my real Friends. (I have written many letters to you which I burn'd & did not send) & why I have not before now finish'd the Miniature I promiss'd to Mrs. Butts? I answer I have not, till now, in any degree pleased myself, & now I must intreat you to Excuse faults, for Portrait Painting is the direct contrary to Designing & Historical Painting, in every respect. If you have not Nature before you for Every Touch, you cannot Paint Portrait; & if you have Nature before you at all, you cannot Paint History; it was Michael Angelo's opinion & is Mine. Pray Give My Wife's love with mine to Mrs. Butts; assure her that it cannot be long before I have the pleasure of Painting from you in Person, & then that she may Expect a likeness, but now I have done All I could, & know she will forgive any failure in consideration of the Endeavour.

And now let me finish with assuring you that, Tho' I have been very unhappy, I am so no longer. I am again Emerged into the light of day; I still & shall to Eternity Embrace Christianity and Adore him who is the Express image of God; but I have travel'd thro' Perils & Darkness not unlike a Champion. I have Conquer'd, and shall Go on Conquering. Nothing can withstand the fury of my Course among the Stars of God & in the Abysses of the Accuser. My Enthusiasm is still what it was, only Enlarged and confirm'd.

I now Send Two Pictures & hope you will approve of them. I have enclosed the Account of Money receiv'd & Work done, which I ought long ago to have sent you; pray forgive Errors in omissions of this kind. I am incapable of many attentions which it is my Duty to observe towards you, thro' multitude of employment & thro' hope of soon seeing you again. I often omit to

Enquire of you. But pray let me now hear how you do & of the welfare of your family.

Accept my Sincere love & respect.

I remain Yours Sincerely,

WILLM. BLAKE.

A Piece of Sea Weed serves for a Barometer; it gets wet & dry as the weather gets so.

#### TO THOMAS BUTTS

DEAR SIR,

After I had finish'd my Letter, I found that I had not said half what I intended to say, & in particular I wish to ask you what subject you choose to be painted on the remaining Canvas which I brought down with me (for there were three), and to tell you that several of the Drawings were in great forwardness; you will see by the Inclosed Account that the remaining Number of Drawings which you gave me orders for is Eighteen. I will finish these with all possible Expedition, if indeed I have not tired you, or, as it is politely call'd, Bored you too much already; or, if you would rather cry out "Enough, Off, Off!", tell me in a Letter of forgiveness if you were offended, & of accustom'd friendship if you were not. But I will bore you more with some Verses which My Wife desires me to Copy out & send you with her kind love & Respect; they were Composed above a twelvemonth ago, while walking from Felpham to Lavant to meet my Sister:

With happiness stretch'd across the hills  
In a cloud that dewy sweetness distills,  
With a blue sky spread over with wings

And a mild sun that mounts & sings,  
With trees & fields full of Fairy elves  
And little devils who fight for themselves—  
Rememb'ring the Verses that Hayley sung  
When my heart knock'd against the root of my tongue—  
With Angels planted in Hawthorn bowers  
And God himself in the passing hours,  
With Silver Angels across my way  
And Golden Demons that none can stay,  
With my Father hovering upon the wind  
And my Brother Robert just behind  
And my Brother John, the evil one,  
In a black cloud making his mone;  
Tho' dead, they appear upon my path,  
Notwithstanding my terrible wrath:  
They beg, they intreat, they drop their tears,  
Fill'd full of hopes, fill'd full of fears—  
With a thousand Angels upon the Wind  
Pouring disconsolate from behind  
To drive them off, & before my way  
A frowning Thistle implores my stay.  
What to others a trifle appears  
Fills me full of smiles or tears;  
For double the vision my Eyes do see,  
And a double vision is always with me.  
With my inward Eye 'tis an old Man grey;  
With my outward, a Thistle across my way.  
"If thou goest back," the thistle said,  
"Thou art to endless woe betray'd;  
For here does Theotormon lower  
And here is Enitharmon's bower  
And Los the terrible thus hath sworn,  
Because thou backward dost return,  
Poverty, Envy, old age & fear  
Shall bring thy Wife upon a bier;  
And Butts shall give what Fuseli gave,  
A dark black Rock & a gloomy Cave."

I struck the Thistle with my foot,  
And broke him up from his delving root:  
"Must the duties of life each other cross?  
Must every joy be dung & dross?  
Must my dear Butts feel cold neglect

Because I give Hayley his due respect?  
Must Flaxman look upon me as wild,  
And all my friends be with doubts beguil'd?  
Must my Wife live in my Sister's bane,  
Or my Sister survive on my Love's pain?  
The curses of Los, the terrible shade,  
And his dismal terrors make me afraid."

So I spoke & struck in my wrath  
The old man weltering upon my path.  
Then Los appear'd in all his power:  
In the Sun he appear'd, descending before  
My face in fierce flames; in my double sight  
'Twas outward a Sun, inward Los in his might.

"My hands are labour'd day & night,  
And Ease comes never in my sight.  
My Wife has no indulgence given  
Except what comes to her from heaven.  
We eat little, we drink less;  
This Earth breeds not our happiness.  
Another Sun feeds our life's streams,  
We are not warmed with thy beams;  
Thou measurest not the Time to me,  
Nor yet the Space that I do see;  
My Mind is not with thy light array'd,  
Thy terrors shall not make me afraid."

When I had my Defiance given,  
The Sun stood trembling in heaven;  
The Moon that glow'd remote below,  
Became leprous & white as snow;  
And every soul of men on the Earth  
Felt affliction & sorrow & sickness & dearth.  
Los flam'd in my path, & the Sun was hot  
With the bows of my Mind & the Arrows of Thought—  
My bowstring fierce with Ardour breathes,  
My arrows glow in their golden sheaves;  
My brother & father march before;  
The heavens drop with human gore.

Now I a fourfold vision see,  
And a fourfold vision is given to me;

'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight  
And threefold in soft Beulah's night  
And twofold Always. May God us keep  
From Single vision & Newton's sleep!

I also inclose you some Ballads by Mr. Hayley, with prints to them by your Hble. Servt. I should have sent them before now, but could not get any thing done for you to please myself; for I do assure you that I have truly studied the two little pictures I now send, & do not repent of the time I have spent upon them.

God bless you.

Yours,  
W. B.

P.S. I have taken the liberty to trouble you with a letter to my Brother, which you will be so kind as to send or give him, & oblige yours,

W. B.

TO THOMAS BUTTS

Felpham,  
*April 25, 1803.*

MY DEAR SIR,

I write in haste, having reciev'd a pressing Letter from my Brother. I intended to have sent the Picture of the Riposo, which is nearly finish'd much to my satisfaction, but not quite; you shall have it soon. I now send the 4 Numbers for Mr. Birch, with best Respects to him. The Reason the Ballads have been suspended is the pressure of other business, but they will go on again soon.

Accept of my thanks for your kind & heartening Letter. You have Faith in the Endeavours of Me, your

weak brother and fellow Disciple; how great must be your faith in our Divine Master! You are to me a Lesson of Humility, while you Exalt me by such distinguishing commendations. I know that you see certain merits in me, which, by God's Grace, shall be made fully apparent & perfect in Eternity; in the mean time I must not bury the Talents in the Earth, but do my endeavour to live to the Glory of our Lord & Saviour; & I am also grateful to the kind hand that endeavours to lift me out of despondency, even if it lifts me too high.

And now, My Dear Sir, Congratulate me on my return to London, with the full approbation of Mr. Hayley & with Promise—But, Alas!

Now I may say to you, what perhaps I should not dare to say to anyone else: That I can alone carry on my visionary studies in London unannoy'd, & that I may converse with my friends in Eternity, See Visions, Dream Dreams & prophecy & speak Parables unobserv'd & at liberty from the Doubts of other Mortals; perhaps Doubts proceeding from Kindness, but Doubts are always pernicious, Especially when we Doubt our Friends. Christ is very decided on this Point: "He who is Not With Me is Against Me." There is no Medium or Middle state; & if a Man is the Enemy of my Spiritual Life while he pretends to be the Friend of my Corporeal, he is a Real Enemy—but the Man may be the friend of my Spiritual Life while he seems the Enemy of my Corporeal, but Not Vice Versa.

What is very pleasant, Every one who hears of my going to London again Applauds it as the only course for the interest of all concern'd in My Works, Observing that I ought not to be away from the opportunities London affords of seeing fine Pictures, and the various improvements in Works of Art going on in London.

But none can know the Spiritual Acts of my three

years' Slumber on the banks of the Ocean, unless he has seen them in the Spirit, or unless he should read My long Poem descriptive of those Acts; for I have in these three years composed an immense number of verses on One Grand Theme, Similar to Homer's Iliad or Milton's Paradise Lost, the Persons & Machinery intirely new to the Inhabitants of Earth (some of the Persons Excepted). I have written this Poem from immediate Dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without Premeditation & even against my Will; the Time it has taken in writing was thus render'd Non Existent, & an immense Poem Exists which seems to be the Labour of a long Life, all produc'd without Labour or Study. I mention this to shew you what I think the Grand Reason of my being brought down here.

I have a thousand & ten thousand things to say to you. My heart is full of futurity. I percieve that the sore travel which has been given me these three years leads to Glory & Honour. I rejoice & I tremble: "I am fearfully & wonderfully made." I had been reading the cxxxix Psalm a little before your Letter arrived. I take your advice. I see the face of my Heavenly Father; he lays his Hand upon my Head & gives a blessing to all my works; why should I be troubled? why should my heart & flesh cry out? I will go on in the Strength of the Lord; through Hell will I sing forth his Praises, that the Dragons of the Deep may praise him, & that those who dwell in darkness & in the Sea coasts may be gather'd into his Kingdom. Excuse my, perhaps, too great Enthusiasm. Please to accept of & give our Loves to Mrs. Butts & your amiable Family, & believe me to be,

Ever Yours Affectionately,

WILL BLAKE.

TO THOMAS BUTTS

Felpham,  
*July 6, 1803.*

DEAR SIR,

I send you the *Riposo*, which I hope you will think my best Picture in many respects. It represents the Holy Family in Egypt, Guarded in their Repose from those Fiends, the Egyptian Gods, and tho' not directly taken from a Poem of Milton's (for till I had design'd it Milton's Poem did not come into my Thoughts), Yet it is very similar to his Hymn on the Nativity, which you will find among his smaller Poems, & will read with great delight. I have given, in the background, a building, which may be supposed the ruin of a Part of Nimrod's tower, which I conjecture to have spread over many Countries; for he ought to be reckon'd of the Giant brood.

I have now on the Stocks the following drawings for you: 1. Jephthab sacrificing his Daughter; 2. Ruth & her mother in Law & Sister; 3. The three Maries at the Sepulcher; 4. The Death of Joseph; 5. The Death of the Virgin Mary; 6. St. Paul Preaching; & 7. The Angel of the Divine Presence clothing Adam & Eve with Coats of Skins.

These are all in great forwardness, & I am satisfied that I improve very much & shall continue to do so while I live, which is a blessing I can never be too thankful for both to God & Man.

We look forward every day with pleasure toward our meeting again in London with those whom we have learn'd to value by absence no less perhaps than we did by presence; for recollection often surpasses every thing,

indeed, the prospect of returning to our friends is supremely delightful—Then, I am determined that Mrs. Butts shall have a good likeness of You, if I have hands & eyes left; for I am become a likeness taker & succeed admirably well; but this is not to be atchiev'd without the original sitting before you for Every touch, all likenesses from memory being necessarily very, very defective; But Nature & Fancy are Two Things & can Never be join'd; neither ought any one to attempt it, for it is Idolatry & destroys the Soul.

I ought to tell you that Mr. H is quite agreeable to our return, & that there is all the appearance in the world of our being fully employ'd in Engraving for his projected Works, Particularly Cowper's Milton, a Work now on foot by Subscription, & I understand that the Subscription goes on briskly. This work is to be a very Elegant one & to consist of All Milton's Poems, with Cowper's Notes and translations by Cowper from Milton's Latin & Italian Poems. These works will be ornamented with Engravings from Designs from Romney, Flaxman & Yr. hble Servt., & to be Engrav'd also by the last mention'd. The Profits of the work are intended to be appropriated to Erect a Monument to the Memory of Cowper in St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey. Such is the Project—& Mr. Addington & Mr. Pitt are both among the Subscribers, which are already numerous & of the first rank; the price of the Work is Six Guineas—Thus I hope that all our three years' trouble Ends in Good Luck at last & shall be forgot by my affections & only remember'd by my Understanding; to be a Memento in time to come, & to speak to future generations by a Sublime Allegory, which is now perfectly completed into a Grand Poem. I may praise it, since I dare not pretend to be any other than the Secretary; the Authors are in Eternity. I consider it as the Grandest Poem that this World Contains.

Allegory addressed to the Intellectual powers, while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding, is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry; it is also somewhat in the same manner defin'd by Plato. This Poem shall, by Divine Assistance, be progressively Printed & Ornamented with Prints & given to the Public. But of this work I take care to say little to Mr. H., since he is as much averse to my poetry as he is to a Chapter in the Bible. He knows that I have writ it, for I have shewn it to him, & he has read Part by his own desire & has looked with sufficient contempt to enhance my opinion of it. But I do not wish to irritate by seeming too obstinate in Poetic pursuits. But if all the World should set their faces against This, I have Orders to set my face like a flint (Ezekiel iiiC, 9v) against their faces, & my forehead against their foreheads.

As to Mr. H., I feel myself at liberty to say as follows upon this ticklish subject: I regard Fashion in Poetry as little as I do in Painting; so, if both Poets & Painters should alternately dislike (but I know the majority of them will not), I am not to regard it at all, but Mr. H. approves of My Designs as little as he does of my Poems, and I have been forced to insist on his leaving me in both to my own Self Will; for I am determin'd to be no longer Pester'd with his Genteel Ignorance & Polite Disapprobation. I know myself both Poet & Painter, & it is not his affected Contempt that can move me to any thing but a more assiduous pursuit of both Arts. Indeed, by my late Firmness I have brought down his affected Loftiness, & he begins to think I have some Genius: as if Genius & Assurance were the same thing! but his imbecile attempts to depress Me only deserve laughter. I say thus much to you, knowing that you will not make a bad use of it. But it is a Fact too true That, if I had only depended on Mortal Things, both myself

& my wife must have been Lost. I shall leave every one in This Country astonish'd at my Patience & Forbearance of Injuries upon Injuries; & I do assure you that, if I could have return'd to London a Month after my arrival here, I should have done so, but I was commanded by my Spiritual friends to bear all, to be silent, & to go thro' all without murmuring, &, in fine, hope, till my three years should be almost accomplish'd; at which time I was set at liberty to remonstrate against former conduct & to demand Justice & Truth; which I have done in so effectual a manner that my antagonist is silenc'd completely, & I have compell'd what should have been of freedom—My Just Right as an Artist & as a Man; & if any attempt should be made to refuse me this, I am inflexible & will relinquish any engagement of Designing at all, unless altogether left to my own Judgment, As you, My dear Friend, have always left me; for which I shall never cease to honour & respect you.

When we meet, I will perfectly describe to you my Conduct & the Conduct of others toward me, & you will see that I have labour'd hard indeed, & have been borne on angel's wings. Till we meet I beg of God our Saviour to be with you & me, & yours & mine. Pray give my & my wife's love to Mrs. Butts & Family, & believe me to remain,

Yours in truth & sincerity,  
WILL BLAKE.

TO THOMAS BUTTS

Felpham,

*August 16, 1803.*

DEAR SIR,

I send 7 Drawings, which I hope will please you; this, I believe, about balances our account. Our return to London draws on apace; our Expectation of meeting again with you is one of our greatest pleasures. Pray tell me how your Eyes do. I never sit down to work but I think of you, & feel anxious for the sight of that friend whose Eyes have done me so much good. I omitted (very unaccountably) to copy out in my last Letter that passage in my rough sketch which related to your kindness in offering to Exhibit my 2 last Pictures in the Gallery in Berners Street; it was in these Words: "I sincerely thank you for your kind offer of Exhibiting my 2 Pictures; the trouble you take on my account, I trust, will be recompensed to you by him who seeth in secret; if you should find it convenient to do so, it will be gratefully remember'd by me among the other numerous kindnesses I have received from you."

I go on with the remaining Subjects which you gave me commission to Execute for you, but shall not be able to send any more before my return, tho' perhaps I may bring some with me finish'd. I am at Present in a Bustle to defend myself against a very unwarrantable warrant from a Justice of Peace in Chichester, which was taken out against me by a Private in Captn. Leathes's troop of 1st or Royal Dragoons, for an assault & seditious words. The wretched Man has terribly Perjur'd himself, as has his Comrade; for, as to Sedition, not one Word relating to the King or Government was spoken

by either him or me. His Enmity arises from my having turned him out of my Garden, into which he was invited as an assistant by a Gardener at work therein, without my knowledge that he was so invited. I desired him, as politely as was possible, to go out of the Garden; he made me an impertinent answer. I insisted on his leaving the Garden; he refused. I still persisted in desiring his departure; he then threaten'd to knock out my Eyes, with many abominable imprecations & with some contempt for my Person; it affronted my foolish Pride. I therefore took him by the Elbows & pushed him before me till I had got him out; there I intended to have left him, but he, turning about, put himself into a Posture of Defiance, threatening & swearing at me. I, perhaps foolishly & perhaps not, stepped out at the Gate, & putting aside his blows, took him again by the Elbows, & keeping his back to me, pushed him forwards down the road about fifty yards—he all the while endeavouring to turn round & strike me, & raging & cursing, which drew out several neighbours; at length, when I had got him to where he was Quarter'd, which was very quickly done, we were met at the Gate by the Master of the house, The Fox Inn (who is the proprietor of my Cottage), & his wife & Daughter & the Man's Comrade & several other people. My Landlord compell'd the Soldiers to go in doors, after many abusive threats against me & my wife from the two Soldiers; but not one word of threat on account of Sedition was utter'd at that time. This method of Revenge was Plann'd between them after they had got together into the stable. This is the whole outline. I have for witnesses: The Gardener, who is Hostler at the Fox & who Evidences that, to his knowledge, no word of the remotest tendency to Government or Sedition was utter'd: Our next door Neighbour, a Miller's wife, who saw me turn him before me

down the road, & saw & heard all that happen'd at the Gate of the Inn, who Evidences that no Expression of threatening on account of Sedition was utter'd in the heat of their fury by either of the Dragoons; this was the woman's own remark, & does high honour to her good sense, as she observes that, whenever a quarrel happens, the offence is always repeated. The Landlord of the Inn & his Wife & daughter will Evidence the same, & will evidently prove the Comrade perjurd, who swore that he heard me, while at the Gate, utter Seditious words & D—the K—, without which perjury I could not have been committed; & I had no witness with me before the Justices who could combat his assertion, as the Gardener remain'd in my Garden all the while, & he was the only person I thought necessary to take with me. I have been before a Bench of Justices at Chichester this morning; but they, as the Lawyer who wrote down the Accusation told me in private, are compell'd by the Military to suffer a prosecution to be enter'd into: altho' they must know, & it is manifest, that the whole is a Fabricated Perjury. I have been forced to find Bail. Mr. Hayley was kind enough to come forwards, & Mr. Seagrave, printer at Chichester; Mr. H. in £100, & Mr. S. in £50; & myself am bound in £100 for my appearance at the Quarter Sessions, which is after Michaelmas. So I shall have the satisfaction to see my friends in Town before this Contemptible business comes on. I say Contemptible, for it must be manifest to every one that the whole accusation is a wilful Perjury. Thus, you see, my dear Friend, that I cannot leave this place without some adventure; it has struck a consternation thro' all the Villages round. Every Man is now afraid of speaking to, or looking at, a Soldier; for the peaceable Villagers have always been forward in expressing their kindness for us, & they express their sorrow at our departure as soon as

they hear of it. Every one here is my Evidence for Peace & Good Neighbourhood; & yet, such is the present state of things, this foolish accusation must be tried in Public. Well, I am content, I murmur not & doubt not that I shall receive Justice, & am only sorry for the trouble & expense. I have heard that my Accuser is a disgraced Sergeant; his name is John Scholfield; perhaps it will be in your power to learn somewhat about the Man. I am very ignorant of what I am requesting of you; I only suggest what I know you will be kind enough to Excuse if you can learn nothing about him, & what, I as well know, if it is possible, you will be kind enough to do in this matter.

Dear Sir, This perhaps was suffer'd to Clear up some doubts, & to give opportunity to those whom I doubted to clear themselves of all imputation. If a Man offends me ignorantly & not designedly, surely I ought to consider him with favour & affection. Perhaps the simplicity of myself is the origin of all offences committed against me. If I have found this, I shall have learned a most valuable thing, well worth three years' perseverance. I have found it. It is certain that a too passive manner, inconsistent with my active physiognomy, had done me much mischief. I must now express to you my conviction that all is come from the spiritual World for Good, & not for Evil.

Give me your advice in my perilous adventure; burn what I have peevishly written about any friend. I have been very much degraded & injuriously treated; but if it all arise from my own fault, I ought to blame myself.

O why was I born with a different face?  
Why was I not born like the rest of my race?  
When I look, each one starts! when I speak, I offend;  
Then I'm silent & passive & lose every Friend.

Then my verse I dishonour, My pictures despise,  
My person degrade & my temper chastise;  
And the pen is my terror, the pencil my shame;  
All my Talents I bury, and dead is my Fame.

I am either too low or too highly priz'd;  
When Elate I am Envy'd, When Meek I'm despis'd.

This is but too just a Picture of my Present state. I pray God to keep you & all men from it, & to deliver me in his own good time. Pray write to me, & tell me how you & your family enjoy health. My much terrified Wife joins me in love to you & Mrs. Butts & all your family. I again take the liberty to beg of you to cause the Enclos'd Letter to be deliver'd to my Brother, & remain Sincerely & Affectionately Yours,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY

London,  
*7 October, 1803.*

DEAR SIR,

Your generous & tender solicitude about your devoted rebel makes it absolutely necessary that he should trouble you with an account of his safe arrival, which will excuse his begging the favor of a few lines to inform him how you escaped the contagion of the Court of Justice—I fear that you have & must suffer more on my account than I shall ever be worth—Arrived safe in London, my wife in very poor health, still I resolve not to lose hope of seeing better days.

Art in London flourishes. Engravers in particular are wanted. Every Engraver turns away work that he cannot execute from his superabundant Employment. Yet

no one brings work to me. I am content that it shall be so as long as God pleases. I know that many works of a lucrative nature are in want of hands; other Engravers are courted. I suppose that I must go a Courting, which I shall do awkwardly; in the meantime I lose no moment to complete Romney to satisfaction.

How is it possible that a Man almost 50 years of Age, who has not lost any of his life since he was five years old without incessant labour & study, how is it possible that such a one with ordinary common sense can be inferior to a boy of twenty, who scarcely has taken or deigns to take pencil in hand, but who rides about the Parks or saunters about the Playhouses, who Eats & drinks for business not for need, how is it possible that such a fop can be superior to the studious lover of Art can scarcely be imagin'd. Yet such is somewhat like my fate & such it is likely to remain. Yet I laugh & sing, for if on Earth neglected I am in heaven a Prince among Princes, & even on Earth beloved by the Good as a Good Man; this I should be perfectly contented with, but at certain periods a blaze of reputation arises round me in which I am consider'd as one distinguish'd by some mental perfection, but the flame soon dies again & I am left stupified and astonish'd. O that I could live as others do in a regular succession of Employment, this wish I fear is not to be accomplish'd to me—Forgive this Dirge-like lamentation over a dead horse, & now I have lamented over the dead horse let me laugh & be merry with my friends till Christmas, for as Man liveth not by bread alone, I shall live altho I should want bread—nothing is necessary to me but to do my Duty & to rejoice in the exceeding joy that is always poured out on my Spirit, to pray that my friends & you above the rest may be made partakers of the joy that the world cannot concieve, that you may still be replenish'd with the same

& be as you always have been, a glorious & triumphant Dweller in immortality. Please to pay for me my best thanks to Miss Poole: tell her that I wish her a continued Excess of Happiness—some say that Happiness is not Good for Mortals, & they ought to be answer'd that Sorrow is not fit for Immortals & is utterly useless to any one; a blight never does good to a tree, & if a blight kill not a tree but it still bear fruit, let none say that the fruit was in consequence of the blight. When this Soldier-like danger is over I will do double the work I do now, for it will hang heavy on my Devil who terribly resents it; but I soothe him to peace, & indeed he is a good natur'd Devil after all & certainly does not lead me into scrapes—he is not in the least to be blamed for the present scrape, as he was out of the way all the time on other employment seeking amusement in making Verses, to which he constantly leads me very much to my hurt & sometimes to the annoyance of my friends; as I perceive he is now doing the same work by my letter, I will finish it, wishing you health & joy in God our Saviour.

To Eternity yours,

WILL<sup>M</sup>. BLAKE.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY

24 May, 1804.

DEAR SIR,

I thank you heartily for your kind offer of reading, &c. I have read the book thro' attentively and was much entertain'd and instructed, but have not yet come to the *Life of Washington*. I suppose an American would tell me that Washington did all that was done before he was born, as the French now adore Buonaparte and the English our poor George; so the Americans will consider

Washington as their god. This is only Grecian, or rather Trojan, worship, and perhaps will be revised [?] in an age or two. In the meantime I have the happiness of seeing the Divine countenance in such men as Cowper and Milton more distinctly than in any prince or hero. Mr. Phillips has sent a small poem; he would not tell the author's name, but desired me to inclose it for you with Washington's *Life*. . . .

Mr. Johnson has, at times, written such letters to me as would have called for the sceptre of Agamemnon rather than the tongue of Ulysses, and I will venture to give it as my settled opinion that if you suffer yourself to be persuaded to print in London you will be cheated every way; but, however, as some little excuse, I must say that in London every calumny and falsehood utter'd against another of the same trade is thought fair play. Engravers, Painters, Statuaries, Printers, Poets, we are not in a field of battle, but in a City of Assassinations. This makes your lot truly enviable, and the country is not only more beautiful on account of its expanded meadows, but also on account of its benevolent minds. My wife joins with me in the hearty wish that you may long enjoy your beautiful retirement.

I am, with best respects to Miss Poole, for whose health we constantly send wishes to our spiritual friends,

Yours sincerely,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY

23 October, 1804.

DEAR SIR,

I received your kind letter with the note to Mr. Payne, and have had the cash from him. I should have returned

my thanks immediately on receipt of it, but hoped to be able to send, before now, proofs of the two plates, the Head of R[omney] and The Shipwreck, which you shall soon see in a much more perfect state. I write immediately because you wish I should do so, to satisfy you that I have received your kind favour.

I take the extreme pleasure of expressing my joy at our good Lady of Lavant's continued recovery: but with a mixture of sincere sorrow on account of the beloved Counsellor. My wife returns her heartfelt thanks for your kind inquiry concerning her health. She is surprisingly recovered. Electricity is the wonderful cause; the swelling of her legs and knees is entirely reduced. She is very near as free from rheumatism as she was five years ago, and we have the greatest confidence in her perfect recovery.

The pleasure of seeing another poem from your hands has truly set me longing (my wife says I ought to have said us) with desire and curiosity; but, however, "Christmas is a-coming."

Our good and kind friend Hawkins is not yet in town—hope soon to have the pleasure of seeing him, with the courage of conscious industry, worthy of his former kindness to me. For now! O Glory! and O Delight! I have entirely reduced that spectrous fiend to his station, whose annoyance has been the ruin of my labours for the last passed twenty years of my life. He is the enemy of conjugal love and is the Jupiter of the Greeks, an iron-hearted tyrant, the ruiner of ancient Greece. I speak with perfect confidence and certainty of the fact which has passed upon me. Nebuchadnezzar had seven times passed over him; I have had twenty; thank God I was not altogether a beast as he was; but I was a slave bound in a mill among beasts and devils; these beasts and these devils are now, together with myself, become

children of light and liberty, and my feet and my wife's feet are free from fetters. O lovely Felpham, parent of Immortal Friendship, to thee I am eternally indebted for my three years' rest from perturbation and the strength I now enjoy. Suddenly, on the day after visiting the Truchsessian Gallery of pictures, I was again enlightened with the light I enjoyed in my youth, and which has for exactly twenty years been closed from me as by a door and by window-shutters. Consequently I can, with confidence, promise you ocular demonstration of my altered state on the plates I am now engraving after Romney, whose spiritual aid has not a little conduced to my restoration to the light of Art. O the distress I have undergone, and my poor wife with me: incessantly labouring and incessantly spoiling what I had done well. Every one of my friends was astonished at my faults, and could not assign a reason; they knew my industry and abstinence from every pleasure for the sake of study, and yet—and yet—and yet there wanted the proofs of industry in my works. I thank God with entire confidence that it shall be so no longer—he is become my servant who domineered over me, he is even as a brother who was my enemy. Dear Sir, excuse my enthusiasm or rather madness, for I am really drunk with intellectual vision whenever I take a pencil or graver into my hand, even as I used to be in my youth, and as I have not been for twenty dark, but very profitable, years. I thank God that I courageously pursued my course through darkness. In a short time I shall make my assertion good that I am become suddenly as I was at first, by producing the Head of Romney and The Shipwreck quite another thing from what you or I ever expected them to be. In short, I am now satisfied and proud of my work, which I have not been for the above long period.

If our excellent and manly friend Meyer is yet with

you, please to make my wife's and my own most respectful and affectionate compliments to him, also to our kind friend at Lavant.

I remain, with my wife's joint affection,  
Your sincere and obliged servant,  
WILL BLAKE.

# TO WILLIAM HAYLEY

4 December, 1804.

"Proofs of my plates will wait on you in a few days. I have mentioned your proposals to our noble Flaxman, whose high & generous spirit relinquishes the whole to me—but that he will overlook and advise. . . . I have indeed fought thro' a Hell of terrors and horrors (which none could know but myself) in a divided existence; now no longer divided nor at war with myself, I shall travel on in the strength of the Lord God, as Poor Pilgrim "says." [*Extracts from sale catalogue.*]

# TO WILLIAM HAYLEY

South Molton Street,  
28 Dec<sup>r</sup>., 1804.

DEAR SIR,

The Death of so Excellent a Man as my Generous Advocate is a Public Loss, which those who knew him can best Estimate, & to those who have an affection for him like Yours, is a Loss that only can be repair'd in Eternity, where it will indeed with such abundant felicity, in the meeting Him a Glorified Saint who was a suffering Mortal, that our Sorrow is swallow'd up in Hope. Such Consolations are alone to be found in Religion, the Sun

& the Moon of our Journey; & such sweet Verses as yours in your last beautiful Poem must now afford you their full reward.

Farewell, Sweet Rose! thou hast got before me into the Celestial City. I also have but a few more Mountains to pass: for I hear the bells ring & the trumpets sound to welcome thy arrival among Cowper's Glorified Band of Spirits of Just Men made Perfect.

Now, My Dear Sir, I will thank you for the transmission of ten Pounds to the Dreamer over his own Fortunes: for I certainly am that Dreamer; but tho' I dream over my own Fortunes, I ought not to Dream over those of other Men, & accordingly have given a look over my account Book, in which I have regularly written down Every Sum I have receiv'd from you; & tho' I never can balance the account of obligations with you, I ought to do my best at all times & in all circumstances. I find that you was right in supposing that I had been paid for all I have done; but when I wrote last requesting ten pounds, I thought it was Due on the Shipwreck (which it was), but I did not advert to the Twelve Guineas which you Lent Me when I made up 30 Pounds to pay our worthy Seagrave in part of his Account. I am therefore that 12 Guineas in your Debt: Which If I had consider'd, I should have used more consideration, & more ceremony also, in so serious an affair as the calling on you for more Money; but, however, your kind answer to my Request makes me Doubly Thank you.

The two Cartoons which I have of Hecate & Pliny are very unequal in point of finishing: the Pliny is a Sketch, tho' admirably contrived for an Effect equal to Rembrandt. But the Hecate is a finish'd Production, which will call for all the Engraver's nicest attention; indeed it is more finish'd than the Shipwreck; it is everybody[s] favourite who have seen it, & they regularly prefer it to

the Shipwreck as a work of Genius. As to the Price of the Plates, Flaxman declares to me that he will not pretend to set a price upon Engraving. I think it can only be done by some Engraver. I consulted Mr. Parker on the subject, before I decided on the Shipwreck, & it was his opinion, & he says it still is so, that a Print of that size cannot be done under 30 Guineas, if finish'd, & if a Sketch, 15 Guineas; as, therefore, Hecate must be a Finish'd Plate, I consider 30 Guineas as its Price, & the Pliny 15 Guineas.

Our Dear Friend Hawkins is out of Town, & will not return till April. I have sent to him, by a parcel from Col. Sibthorpe's, your Desirable Poetical Present for Mrs. Hawkins. His address is this—To John Hawkins, Esq<sup>r</sup>., Dallington, near Northampton. Mr. Edwards is out of Town likewise.

I am very far from shewing the Portrait of Romney as a finish'd Proof; be assured that with our Good Flaxman's good help, & with your remarks on it in addition, I hope to make it a Supernaculum. The Shipwreck, also, will be infinitely better the next proof. I feel very much gratified at your approval of my Queen Catherine: beg to observe that the Print of Romeo & the Apothecary annex'd to your copy is a shamefully worn-out impression, but it was the only one I could get at Johnson's. I left a good impression of it when I left Felpham last in one of Heath's Shakespeare: you will see that it is not like the same Plate with the worn-out Impression. My wife joins me in love & in rejoicing in Miss Poole's continued health. I am, dear Sir,

Yours sincerely,  
WILL BLAKE.

L. P.S. I made a very high finish'd Drawing of Romney as a companion to my drawing of the head of Cowper (you remember), with which Flaxman is very much sat-

ished, & says that when my Print is like that I need wish it no better, & I am determin'd to make it so at least.

W.B.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY

Sth. Molton Street,  
*11 December, 1805.*

DEAR SIR,

I cannot omit to Return you my sincere & Grateful Acknowledgments for the kind Reception you have given my New Projected Work. It bids fair to set me above the difficulties I have hitherto encountered. But my Fate has been so uncommon that I expect Nothing. I was alive and in health and with the same Talents I now have all the time of Boydell's, Machlin's, Bowyer's, & other great works. I was known to them and was look'd upon by them as Incapable of Employment in those Works; it may turn out so again, notwithstanding appearances. I am prepared for it, but at the same time sincerely Grateful to Those whose Kindness & Good opinion has supported me thro' all hitherto. You, Dear Sir, are one who has my Particular Gratitude, having conducted me thro' Three that would have been the Darkest Years that ever Mortal Suffer'd, which were render'd thro' your means a Mild and Pleasant Slumber. I speak of Spiritual Things, Not of Natural; of Things known only to Myself and to Spirits Good and Evil, but Not known to Men on Earth. It is the passage thro' these Three Years that has brought me into my Present State, and I *know* that if I had not been with You I must have Perish'd. Those Dangers are now passed and I can see them beneath my feet. It will not be long before I shall be able to present the full history of my Spiritual Suffer-

ings to the dwellers upon Earth and of the Spiritual Victories obtained for me by my Friends. Excuse this Effusion of the Spirit from One who cares little for this World, which passes away, whose happiness is Secure in Jesus our Lord, and who looks for suffering till the time of complete deliverance. In the meanwhile I am kept Happy, as I used to be, because I throw Myself and all that I have on our Saviour's Divine Providence. O what wonders are the Children of Men! Would to God that they would consider it,—that they would consider their Spiritual Life, regardless of that faint Shadow called Natural Life, and that they would Promote Each other's Spiritual labours, each according to its Rank, & that they would know that Receiving a Prophet as a Prophet is a Duty which If omitted is more Severely Avenged than Every Sin and Wickedness beside. It is the Greatest of Crimes to Depress True Art and Science. I know that those who are dead from the Earth, & who mocked and Despised the Meekness of True Art (and such, I find, have been the situation of our Beautiful, Affectionate Ballads), I know that such Mockers are Most Severely Punished in Eternity. I know it, for I see it & dare not help. The Mockers of Art is the Mockers of Jesus. Let us go on, Dear Sir, following his Cross: let us take it up daily, Persisting in Spiritual Labours & the Use of that Talent which it is Death to Bury, and of that Spirit to which we are called.

Pray Present My Sincerest Thanks to our Good Paulina, whose kindness to Me shall receive recompense in the Presence of Jesus. Present also my Thanks to the generous Seagrave, In whose debt I have been too long, but perceive that I shall be able to settle with him soon what is between us. I have delivered to Mr. Sanders the 3 works of Romney, as Mrs. Lambert told me you wished to have them. A very few touches will finish the

Shipwreck; those few I have added upon a Proof before I parted with the Picture. It is a Print that I feel proud of, on a New inspection. Wishing you and All Friends in Sussex a Merry & Happy Christmas,

I remain, Ever Your Affectionate,

WILL BLAKE and his Wife CATHERINE BLAKE.

TO RICHARD PHILLIPS

[June, 1806.]

SIR,

My indignation was exceedingly moved at reading a criticism in *Bell's Weekly Messenger* (25th May) on the picture of Count Ugolino, by Mr. Fuseli, in the Royal Academy Exhibition; and your Magazine being as extensive in its circulation as that Paper, and as it also must from its nature be more permanent, I take the advantageous opportunity to counteract the widely diffused malice which has for many years, under the pretence of admiration of the arts, been assiduously sown and planted among the English public against true art, such as it existed in the days of Michael Angelo and Raphael. Under pretence of fair criticism and candour, the most wretched taste ever produced has been upheld for many, very many years; but now, I say, now its end is come. Such an artist as Fuseli is invulnerable, he needs not my defence; but I should be ashamed not to set my hand and shoulder, and whole strength, against those wretches who, under pretence of criticism, use the dagger and the poison.

My criticism on this picture is as follows: Mr. Fuseli's Count Ugolino is the father of sons of feeling and dignity, who would not sit looking in their parent's face in the moment of his agony, but would rather retire and

die in secret, while they suffer him to indulge his passionate and innocent grief, his innocent and venerable madness and insanity and fury, and whatever paltry, cold-hearted critics cannot, because they dare not, look upon. Fuseli's Count Ugolino is a man of wonder and admiration, of resentment against man and devil, and of humiliation before God; prayer and parental affection fill the figure from head to foot. The child in his arms, whether boy or girl signifies not (but the critic must be a fool who has not read Dante, and who does not know a boy from a girl), I say, the child is as beautifully drawn as it is coloured—in both, inimitable! and the effect of the whole is truly sublime, on account of that very colouring which our critic calls black and heavy. The German flute colour, which was used by the Flemings (they call it burnt bone), has possessed the eye of certain connoisseurs, that they cannot see appropriate colouring, and are blind to the gloom of a real terror.

The taste of English amateurs has been too much formed upon pictures imported from Flanders and Holland; consequently our countrymen are easily brow-beat on the subject of painting; and hence it is so common to hear a man say: "I am no judge of pictures." But O Englishmen! know that every man ought to be a judge of pictures, and every man is so who has not been connoisseured out of his senses.

A gentleman who visited me the other day, said, "I am very much surprised at the dislike that some connoisseurs shew on viewing the pictures of Mr. Fuseli; but the truth is, he is a hundred years beyond the present generation." Though I am startled at such an assertion, I hope the contemporary taste will shorten the hundred years into as many hours; for I am sure that any person consulting his own eyes must prefer what is so supereminent; and I am sure that any person con-

sulting his own reputation, or the reputation of his country, will refrain from disgracing either by such ill-judged criticisms in future.

Yours,

WM. BLAKE.

# TO RICHARD PHILLIPS

17 Sth Molton St.

Oct 14 [1807]

SIR

A circumstance has occurred which has again raised my Indignation.

I read in the "Oracle & True Briton" of Octr. 13, 1807, that a Mr. Blair, a Surgeon, has, with *the Cold fury of Robespierre*, caused the Police to sieze upon the Person & Goods or Property of an Astrologer & to commit him to Prison. The Man who can Read the Stars often is opressed by their Influence, no less than the Newtonian who reads Not & cannot Read is opressed by his own Reasonings & Experiments. We are all subject to Error: Who shall say, except the National Religionists, that we are not all subject to Crime?

My desire is that you would Enquire into this Affair & that you would publish this in your Monthly Magazine. I do not pay the postage of this Letter, because you, as Sheriff, are bound to attend to it.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

# TO OZIAS HUMPHRY

18 January, 1808.

The design of The Last Judgment, which I have completed, by your recommendation, for the Countess of

Egremont, it is necessary to give some account of; and its various parts ought to be described, for the accommodation of those who give it the honour of their attention.

Christ seated on the Throne of Judgment: before His feet and around Him the Heavens, in clouds, are rolling like a scroll, ready to be consumed in the fires of Angels, who descend with the four trumpets sounding to the four winds.

Beneath, the earth is convulsed with the labours of the Resurrection. In the caverns of the earth is the Dragon with seven heads and ten horns, chained by two Angels; and above his cavern, on the earth's surface, is the Harlot, seized and bound by two Angels with chains, while her palaces are falling into ruins, and her counsellors and warriors are descending into the abyss, in wailing and despair.

Hell opens beneath the Harlot's seat on the left hand, into which the wicked are descending.

The right hand of the design is appropriated to the Resurrection of the Just; the left hand of the design is appropriated to the Resurrection and Fall of the Wicked.

Immediately before the Throne of Christ are Adam and Eve, kneeling in humiliation, as representatives of the whole human race. Abraham and Moses kneel on each side beneath them; from the cloud on which Eve kneels, is seen Satan, wound round by the Serpent, and falling headlong; the Pharisees appear on the left hand, pleading their own Righteousness before the Throne of Christ and before the Book of Death, which is opened on clouds by two Angels; many groups of figures are falling from before the throne, and from the sea of fire which flows before the steps of the throne, on which are seen the seven Lamps of the Almighty, burning before the throne. Many figures, chained and bound together,

and in various attitudes of despair and horror, fall through the air, and some are scourged by Spirits with flames of fire into the abyss of Hell which opens beneath, on the left hand of the Harlot's seat; where others are howling and descending into the flames, and in the act of dragging each other into Hell, and of contending and fighting with each other on the brink of perdition.

Before the Throne of Christ on the right hand, the Just, in humiliation and in exultation, rise through the air with their children and families, some of whom are bowing before the Book of Life, which is opened on clouds by two Angels; many groups arise in exultation; among them is a figure crowned with stars, and the moon beneath her feet, with six infants around her—she represents the Christian Church. Green hills appear beneath with the graves of the blessed, which are seen bursting with their births of immortality; parents and children, wives and husbands, embrace and arise together, and in exulting attitudes tell each other that the New Jerusalem is ready to descend upon earth; they arise upon the air rejoicing; others, newly awaked from the grave, stand upon the earth embracing and shouting to the Lamb, who cometh in the clouds with power and great glory.

The whole upper part of the design is a view of Heaven opened, around the Throne of Christ. In the clouds, which roll away, are the four living creatures filled with eyes, attended by seven Angels with seven vials of the wrath of God, and above these, seven Angels with the seven trumpets; these compose the cloud which, by its rolling away, displays the opening seats of the Blessed; on the right and the left of which are seen the four-and-twenty Elders seated on thrones to judge the Dead.

Behind the seat and Throne of Christ appear the

Tabernacle with its veil opened, the Candlestick on the right, the Table with Shewbread on the left, and, in the midst, the Cross in place of the Ark, the Cherubim bowing over it.

On the right hand of the Throne of Christ is Baptism, on His left is the Lord's Supper—the two introducers into Eternal Life. Women with infants approach the figure of an Apostle, which represents Baptism; and on the left hand the Lord's Supper is administered by Angels, from the hands of another aged Apostle; these kneel on each side of the throne, which is surrounded by a glory: in the glory many infants appear, representing Eternal Creation flowing from the Divine Humanity in Jesus, who opens the Scroll of Judgment, upon His knees, before the Living and the Dead.

Such is the Design which you, my dear Sir, have been the cause of my producing, and which, but for you, might have slept till the Last Judgment.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

#### TO GEORGE CUMBERLAND

*19 Decr., 1808.*

DEAR CUMBERLAND,

I am very much obliged by your kind ardour in my cause, & should immediately Engage in reviewing my former pursuits of painting if I had not so long been turned out of the old channel into a new one, that it is impossible for me to return to it without destroying my present course. New Vanities, or rather new pleasures, occupy my thoughts. New profits seem to arise before me so tempting that I have already involved myself in engagements that preclude all possibility of promising anything. I have, however, the satisfaction to inform

you that I have Myself begun to print an account of my various Inventions in Art, for which I have procured a Publisher, & am determin'd to pursue the plan of publishing what I may get printed without disarranging my time, which in future must alone be devoted to Designing & Painting. When I have got my work printed I will send it you first of any body; in the mean time, believe me to be

Your sincere friend,  
WILL BLAKE.

TO OZIAS HUMPHRY

[1809]

DEAR SIR,

You will see in this little work the cause of difference between you & me. You demand of me to Mix two things that Reynolds has confess'd cannot be mixed. You will perceive that I not only detest False Art, but have the Courage to say so Publickly & to dare all the Power on Earth to oppose—Florentine & Venetian Art cannot exist together. Till the Venetian & Flemish are destroy'd, the Florentine & Roman cannot Exist; this will be shortly accomplish'd; till then I remain your Grateful, altho' Seemingly otherwise, I say your Grateful & Sincere

WILLIAM BLAKE.

I inclose a ticket of admission if you should honour my Exhibition with a Visit.

## TO DAWSON TURNER

17 South Molton Street,  
9 June, 1818.

SIR,

I send you a List of the different Works you have done me the honour to enquire after—unprofitable enough to me, tho' Expensive to the Buyer. Those I Printed for Mr. Humphry are a selection from the different Books of such as could be Printed without the Writing, tho' to the Loss of some of the best things. For they, when Printed perfect, accompany Poetical Personifications & Acts, without which Poems they never could have been Executed.

			£	s.	d.
America	- - - -	18 Prints folio	5	5	0
Europe	- - - -	17 do. folio	5	5	0
Visions, &c.	- - - -	8 do. folio	3	3	0
Thel	- - - -	6 do. Quarto	2	2	0
Songs of Innocence	- - - -	28 do. Octavo	3	3	0
Songs of Experience	- - - -	26 do. Octavo	3	3	0
Urizen	- - - -	28 Prints Quarto	5	5	0
Milton	- - - -	50 do. Quarto	10	10	0
12 Large Prints, Size of Each about 2 feet by 1					
& ½, Historical & Poetical, Printed in Colours					
			each	5	5 0

These last 12 Prints are unaccompanied by any writing.

The few I have Printed & Sold are sufficient to have gained me great reputation as an Artist, which was the chief thing Intended. But I have never been able to produce a sufficient number for a general Sale by means of a regular Publisher. It is therefore necessary to me that any Person wishing to have any or all of them should send me their Order to Print them on the above terms, &

I will take care that they shall be done at least as well as any I have yet Produced.

I am, Sir, with many thanks for your very Polite approbation of my works,

Your most obedient Servant,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

TO JOHN LINNELL

*Feby. 1, 1826.*

DEAR SIR,

I am forced to write, because I cannot come to you, & this on two accounts. First, I omitted to desire you would come & take a Mutton chop with us the day you go to Cheltenham, & I will go with you to the Coach; also, I will go to Hampstead to see Mrs. Linnell on Sunday, but will return before dinner (I mean if you set off before that), & Second, I wish to have a Copy of Job to shew to Mr. Chantry.

For I am again laid up by a cold in my stomach; the Hampstead Air, as it always did, so I fear it always will do this, Except it be the Morning air; & That, in my Cousin's time, I found I could bear with safety & perhaps benefit. I believe my Constitution to be a good one, but it has many peculiarities that no one but myself can know. When I was young, Hampstead, Highgate, Hornsea, Muswell Hill, & even Islington & all places North of London, always laid me up the day after, & sometimes two or three days, with precisely the same Complaint & the same torment of the Stomach, Easily removed, but excruciating while it lasts & enfeebling for some time after. Sr. Francis Bacon would say, it is want of discipline in Mountainous Places. Sr. Francis Bacon is a Liar. No discipline will turn one Man into another,

even in the least particle, & such discipline I call Presumption & Folly. I have tried it too much not to know this, & am very sorry for all such who may be led to such ostentatious Exertion against their Eternal Existence itself, because it is Mental Rebellion against the Holy Spirit, & fit only for a Soldier of Satan to perform.

Though I hope in a morning or two to call on you in Cirencester Place, I feared you might be gone, or I might be too ill to let you know how I am, & what I wish.

I am, dear Sir,  
Yours sincerely,  
WILLIAM BLAKE.

TO JOHN LINNELL

*Tuesday Night [? 1826].*

DEAR SIR,

I return you thanks for The Two Pounds you now send me. As to Sr. T. Lawrence, I have not heard from him as yet, & hope that he has a good opinion of my willingness to appear grateful, tho' not able, on account of this abominable Ague, or whatever it is. I am in Bed & at work; my health I cannot speak of, for if it was not for the Cold weather I think I should soon get about again. Great Men die equally with the little. I am sorry for Ld. Ls.; he is a man of very singular abilities, as also for the D. of C.; but perhaps, & I verily believe it, Every death is an improvement of the State of the Departed. I can draw as well a-Bed as Up, & perhaps better; but I cannot Engrave. I am going on with Dante, & please myself.

I am, dr. Sir, yours sincerely,  
WILLIAM BLAKE.

TO JOHN LINNELL

*Friday Evening.**May 19, 1826.*

DEAR SIR,

I have had another desperate shivering Fit; it came on yesterday afternoon after as good a morning as I ever experienced. It began by a gnawing Pain in the Stomach, & soon spread a deathly feel all over the limbs, which brings on the shivering fit, when I am forced to go to bed, where I contrive to get into a little perspiration, which takes it quite away. It was night when it left me, so I did not get up, but just as I was going to rise this morning, the shivering fit attacked me again & the pain, with its accompanying deathly feel. I got again into a perspiration, & was well, but so much weaken'd that I am still in bed. This entirely prevents me from the pleasure of seeing you on Sunday at Hampstead, as I fear the attack again when I am away from home.

I am, dr. Sir,

Yours sincerely,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

TO JOHN LINNELL

*5 July, 1826.*

DEAR SIR,

I thank you for the Receipt of Five Pounds this Morning, & Congratulate you on the receipt of another fine Boy; am glad to hear of Mrs. Linnell's health & safety.

I am getting better every hour; my Plan is diet only; & if the Machine is capable of it, shall make an old man yet. I go on just as if perfectly well, which indeed I am,

except in those paroxysms which I now believe will never more return. Pray let your own health & convenience put all solicitude concerning me at rest. You have a Family, I have none; there is no comparison between our necessary avocations.

Believe me to be, dr. Sir,

Yours sincerely,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

# TO JOHN LINNELL

*February, 1827.*

DEAR SIR,

I thank you for the five pounds received to-day. Am getting better every morning, but slowly, as I am still feeble and tottering, though all the symptoms of my complaint seem almost gone. The fine weather is very beneficial and comfortable to me. I go on, as I think, improving my engravings of Dante more and more, and shall soon get proofs of these four which I have, and beg the favour of you to send me the two plates of Dante which you have, that I may finish them sufficiently to make show of colour and strength.

I have thought and thought of the removal. I cannot get my mind out of a state of terrible fear at such a step. The more I think, the more I feel terror at what I wished at first and thought a thing of benefit and good hope. You will attribute it to its right cause—intellectual peculiarity, that must be myself alone shut up in myself, or reduced to nothing. I could tell you of visions and dreams upon the subject. I have asked and entreated Divine help, but fear continues upon me, and I must relinquish the step that I had wished to take, and still wish, but in vain.

Your success in your profession is, above all things to me, most gratifying. May it go on to the perfection you wish, and more. So wishes also

Yours sincerely,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

TO GEORGE CUMBERLAND

N 3, FOUNTAIN COURT, STRAND.

*12 April, 1827.*

I have been very near the gates of death, and have returned very weak and an old man, feeble and tottering, but not in spirit and life, not in the real man, the imagination, which liveth for ever. In that I am stronger and stronger, as this foolish body decays. I thank you for the pains you have taken with poor Job. I know too well that the great majority of Englishmen are fond of the indefinite, which they measure by Newton's doctrine of the fluxions of an atom, a thing which does not exist. These are politicians, and think that Republican art is inimical to their atom, for a line or a lineament is not formed by chance. A line is a line in its minutest subdivisions, straight or crooked. It is itself, not intermeasurable by anything else. Such is Job. But since the French Revolution Englishmen are all intermeasurable by one another: certainly a happy state of agreement, in which I for one do not agree. God keep you and me from the divinity of yes and no too—the yea, nay, creeping Jesus—from supposing up and down to be the same thing, as all experimentalists must suppose.

You are desirous, I know, to dispose of some of my works, but having none remaining of all I have printed, I cannot print more except at a great loss. I am now painting a set of the Songs of Innocence and Experience

for a friend at ten guineas. The last work I produced is a poem entitled Jerusalem, the Emanation of the Giant Albion, but find that to print it will cost my time the amount of Twenty Guineas. One I have Finish'd. It contains 100 Plates, but it is not likely I shall get a Customer for it.

As you wish me to send you a list with the Prices of these things, they are as follows:

	£	s	d.
America . . . . .	6	6	0
Europe . . . . .	6	6	0
Visions, &c. . . . .	5	5	0
Thel . . . . .	3	3	0
Songs of Inn. & Exp. . . . .	10	10	0
Urizen . . . . .	6	6	0

The Little Card I will do as soon as Possible, but when you Consider that I have been reduced to a Skeleton, from which I am slowly recovering, you will, I hope, have Patience with me.

Flaxman is Gone, & we must All soon follow, every one to his Own Eternal House, Leaving the delusive Goddess Nature & her Laws, to get into Freedom from all Law of the Members, into The Mind, in which every one is King & Priest in his own House. God send it so on Earth, as it is in Heaven.

I am, dear Sir, Yours affectionately,  
WILLIAM BLAKE.

TO JOHN LINNELL

25 April, 1827.

DEAR SIR,

I am going on better Every day, as I think, both in health & in work. I thank you for The Ten Pounds which

I recieved from you this day, which shall be put to the best use; as also for the prospect of Mr. Ottley's advantageous acquaintance. I go on without daring to count on Futurity, which I cannot do without doubt & Fear that ruins Activity, & are the greatest hurt to an artist such as I am. As to Ugolino, &c., I never supposed that I should sell them; my Wife alone is answerable for their having Existed in any finish'd State. I am too much attach'd to Dante to think much of anything else. I have Proved the Six Plates, & reduced the Fighting devils ready for the Copper. I count myself sufficiently Paid If I live as I now do, & only fear that I may be Unlucky to my friends, & especially that I may not be so to you.

I am, sincerely yours,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

TO JOHN LINNELL

*3 July, 1827.*

DEAR SIR,

I thank you for the Ten Pounds you are so kind as to send me at this time. My journey to Hampstead on Sunday brought on a relapse which is lasted till now. I find I am not so well as I thought. I must not go on in a youthful Style; however, I am upon the mending hand to-day, & hope soon to look as I did; for I have been yellow, accompanied by all the old Symptoms.

I am, dear Sir,

Yours sincerely,

WILLIAM BLAKE.



*VI.*

THE  
PROPHETIC  
BOOKS







## THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL

(1793)

### THE ARGUMENT

Rintiah roars & shakes his fires in the burden'd air;  
Hungry clouds swag on the deep.

Once meek, and in a perilous path,  
The just man kept his course along  
The vale of death.  
Roses are planted where thorns grow,  
And on the barren heath  
Sing the honey bees.

Then the perilous path was planted,  
And a river and a spring  
On every cliff and tomb,  
And on the bleached bones  
Red clay brought forth;

Till the villain left the paths of ease,  
To walk in perilous paths, and drive  
The just man into barren climes.

Now the sneaking serpent walks  
In mild humility,  
And the just man rages in the wilds  
Where lions roam.

Rintrah roars & shakes his fires in the burden'd air;  
Hungry clouds swag on the deep.

As a new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent, the Eternal Hell revives. And lo! Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb: his writings are the linen clothes folded up. Now is the dominion of Edom, & the return of Adam into Paradise. See Isaiah xxxiv & xxxv Chap.

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.

From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.

Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell.

## THE VOICE OF THE DEVIL

All Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following Errors:

1. That Mān has two real existing principles: Viz: a Body & a Soul.
2. That Energy, call'd Evil, is alone from the Body; & that Reason, call'd Good, is alone from the Soul.
3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

But the following Contraries to these are True:

1. Mān has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.
2. Energy is the only life, and is from the Body; and

Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.

### 3. Energy is Eternal Delight.

Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling.

And being restrain'd, it by degrees becomes passive, till it is only the shadow of desire.

The history of this is written in *Paradise Lost*, & the Governor or Reason is call'd Messiah.

And the original Archangel, or possessor of the command of the heavenly host, is call'd the Devil or Satan, and his children are call'd Sin & Death.

But in the Book of Job, Milton's Messiah is call'd Satan.

For this history has been adopted by both parties.

It indeed appear'd to Reason as if Desire was cast out; but the Devil's account is, that the Messiah fell, & formed a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss.

This is shewn in the Gospel, where he prays to the Father to send the comforter, or Desire, that Reason may have Ideas to build on; the Jehovah of the Bible being no other than he who dwells in flaming fire.

Know that after Christ's death, he became Jehovah.

But in Milton, the Father is Destiny, the Son a Ratio of the five senses, & the Holy-ghost Vacuum!

NOTE: The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it.

## A MEMORABLE FANCY

As I was walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius, which to Angels look like torment and insanity, I collected some of their Proverbs; thinking that as the sayings used in a nation mark its character, so the Proverbs of Hell show the nature of Infernal wisdom better than any description of buildings or garments.

When I came home: on the abyss of the five senses, where a flat sided steep frowns over the present world, I saw a mighty Devil folded in black clouds, hovering on the sides of the rock: with corroding fires he wrote the following sentence now perceived by the minds of men, & read by them on earth:

How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,  
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses  
five?

## PROVERBS OF HELL

In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy.  
Drive your cart and your plow over the bones of the dead.

The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.  
Prudence is a rich, ugly old maid courted by Incapacity.

He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence.

The cut worm forgives the plow.

Dip him in the river who loves water.

A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees.

He whose face gives no light, shall never become a star.

Eternity is in love with the productions of time.

The busy bee has no time for sorrow.

The hours of folly are measur'd by the clock; but of wisdom, no clock can measure.

All wholesome food is caught without a net or a trap.

Bring out number, weight & measure in a year of dearth.

No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings.

A dead body revenges not injuries.

The most sublime act is to set another before you.

If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise.

Folly is the cloke of knavery.

Shame is Pride's cloke.

Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion.

The pride of the peacock is the glory of God.

The lust of the goat is the bounty of God.

The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God.

The nakedness of woman is the work of God.

Excess of sorrow laughs. Excess of joy weeps.

The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword, are portions of eternity, too great for the eye of man.

The fox condemns the trap, not himself.

Joys impregnate. Sorrows bring forth.

Let man wear the fell of the lion, woman the fleece of the sheep.

The bird a nest, the spider a web, man friendship.

The selfish, smiling fool, & the sullen, frowning fool shall be both thought wise, that they may be a rod.

What is now proved was once only imagin'd.

The rat, the mouse, the fox, the rabbit watch the

roots; the lion, the tyger, the horse, the elephant watch the fruits.

The cistern contains: the fountain overflows.

One thought fills immensity.

Always be ready to speak your mind, and a base man will avoid you.

Every thing possible to be believ'd is an image of truth.

The eagle never lost so much time as when he submitted to learn of the crow.

The fox provides for himself, but God provides for the lion.

Think in the morning. Act in the noon. Eat in the evening. Sleep in the night.

He who has suffer'd you to impose on him, knows you.

As the plow follows words, so God rewards prayers.

The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.

Expect poison from the standing water.

You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough.

Listen to the fool's reproach! it is a kingly title!

The eyes of fire, the nostrils of air, the mouth of water, the beard of earth.

The weak in courage is strong in cunning.

The apple tree never asks the beech how he shall grow; nor the lion, the horse, how he shall take his prey.

The thankful reciever bears a plentiful harvest.

If others had not been foolish, we should be so.

The soul of sweet delight can never be defil'd.

When thou seest an Eagle, thou seest a portion of Genius; lift up thy head!

As the caterpillar chooses the fairest leaves to lay her eggs on, so the priest lays his curse on the fairest joys.

To create a little flower is the labour of ages.

Damn braces. Bless relaxes.

The best wine is the oldest, the best water the newest.

Prayers plow not! Praises reap not!

Joys laugh not! Sorrows weep not!

The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals  
Beauty, the hands & feet Proportion.

As the air to a bird or the sea to a fish, so is contempt  
to the contemptible.

The crow wish'd every thing was black, the owl that  
every thing was white.

Exuberance is Beauty.

If the lion was advised by the fox, he would be cun-  
ning.

Improvement makes strait roads; but the crooked  
roads without Improvement are roads of Genius.

Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse un-  
acted desires.

Where man is not, nature is barren.

Truth can never be told so as to be understood, and  
not be believ'd.

Enough! or Too much.

The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with  
Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorn-  
ing them with the properties of woods, rivers, moun-  
tains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged  
& numerous senses could perceive.

And particularly they studied the genius of each city  
& country, placing it under its mental deity;  
Till a system was formed, which some took advan-  
tage of, & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize  
or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus  
began Priesthood;

Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.

And at length they pronounc'd that the Gods had order'd such things.

Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast.

#### A MEMORABLE FANCY

The Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with me, and I asked them how they dared so roundly to assert that God spoke to them; and whether they did not think at the time that they would be misunderstood, & so be the cause of imposition.

Isaiah answer'd: "I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover'd the infinite in everything, and as I was then perswaded, & remain confirm'd, that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences, but wrote."

Then I asked: "Does a firm perswasion that a thing is so, make it so?"

He replied: "All poets believe that it does, & in ages of imagination this firm perswasion removed mountains; but many are not capable of a firm perswasion of any thing."

Then Ezekiel said: "The philosophy of the east taught the first principles of human perception: some nations held one principle for the origin, and some another: we of Israel taught that the Poetic Genius (as you now call it) was the first principle and all the others merely derivative, which was the cause of our despising the Priests & Philosophers of other countries, and prophesying that all Gods would at last be proved to originate in ours & to be the tributaries of the Poetic Genius; it was this that our great poet, King David, desired so

fervently & invokes so pathetically, saying by this he conquers enemies & governs kingdoms; and we so loved our God, that we cursed in his name all the deities of surrounding nations, and asserted that they had rebelled: from these opinions the vulgar came to think that all nations would at last be subject to the jews."

"This," said he, "like all firm perswasions, is come to pass; for all nations believe the jews' code and worship the jews' god, and what greater subjection can be?"

I heard this with some wonder, & must confess my own conviction. After dinner I ask'd Isaiah to favour the world with his lost works; he said none of equal value was lost. Ezekiel said the same of his.

I also asked Isaiah what made him go naked and bare-foot three years? he answer'd: "the same that made our friend Diogenes, the Grecian."

I then asked Ezekiel why he eat dung, & lay so long on his right & left side? he answer'd, "the desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite: this the North American tribes practise, & is he honest who resists his genius or conscience only for the sake of present ease or gratification?"

The ancient tradition that the world will be consumed in fire at the end of six thousand years is true, as I have heard from Hell.

For the cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at tree of life; and when he does, the whole creation will be consumed and appear infinite and holy, whereas it now appears finite & corrupt.

This will come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment.

But first the notion that man has a body distinct from

his soul is to be expunged; this I shall do by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid.

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.

#### A MEMORABLE FANCY

I was in a Printing house in Hell, & saw the method in which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation.

In the first chamber was a Dragon-Man, clearing away the rubbish from a cave's mouth; within, a number of Dragons were hollowing the cave.

In the second chamber was a Viper folding round the rock & the cave, and others adorning it with gold, silver and precious stones.

In the third chamber was an Eagle with wings and feathers of air: he caused the inside of the cave to be infinite; around were numbers of Eagle-like men who built palaces in the immense cliffs.

In the fourth chamber were Lions of flaming fire, raging around & melting the metals into living fluids.

In the fifth chamber were Unnam'd forms, which cast the metals into the expanse.

There they were reciev'd by Men who occupied the sixth chamber, and took the forms of books & were arranged in libraries.

The Giants who formed this world into its sensual existence, and now seem to live in it in chains, are in truth the causes of its life & the sources of all activity; but the chains are the cunning of weak and tame minds which have power to resist energy; according to the proverb, the weak in courage is strong in cunning.

Thus one portion of being is the Prolific, the other the Devouring; to the Devourer it seems as if the producer was in his chains; but it is not so, he only takes portions of existence and fancies that the whole.

But the Prolific would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer, as a sea, received the excess of his delights.

Some will say: "Is not God alone the Prolific?" I answer: "God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men."

These two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies: whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence.

Religion is an endeavour to reconcile the two.

NOTE: Jesus Christ did not wish to unite, but to separate them, as in the Parable of sheep and goats! & he says: "I came not to send Peace, but a Sword."

Messiah or Satan or Tempter was formerly thought to be one of the Antediluvians who are our Energies.

#### A MEMORABLE FANCY

An Angel came to me and said: "O pitiable foolish young man! O horrible! O dreadful state! consider the hot burning dungeon thou art preparing for thyself to all eternity, to which thou art going in such career."

I said: "Perhaps you will be willing to shew me my eternal lot, & we will contemplate together upon it, and see whether your lot or mine is most desirable."

So he took me thro' a stable & thro' a church & down

into the church vault, at the end of which was a mill: thro' the mill we went, and came to a cave: down the winding cavern we groped our tedious way, till a void boundless as a nether sky appear'd beneath us, & we held by the roots of trees and hung over this immensity; but I said: "if you please, we will commit ourselves to this void, and see whether providence is here also: if you will not, I will:" but he answer'd: "do not presume, O young man, but as we here remain, behold thy lot which will soon appear when the darkness passes away."

So I remain'd with him, sitting in the twisted roof of an oak; he was suspended in a fungus, which hung with the head downward into the deep.

By degrees we beheld the infinite Abyss, fiery as the smoke of a burning city; beneath us, at an immense distance, was the sun, black but shining, round it were fiery tracks on which revolv'd vast spiders, crawling after their prey, which flew, or rather swum, in the infinite deep, in the most terrific shapes of animals sprung from corruption, & the air was full of them, & seem'd composed of them: these are Devils, and are called Powers of the air. I now asked my companion which was my eternal lot? he said: "between the black & white spiders."

But now, from between the black & white spiders, a cloud and fire burst and rolled thro' the deep, black'ning all beneath, so that the nether deep grew black as a sea, & rolled with a terrible noise; beneath us was nothing now to be seen but a black tempest, till looking east between the clouds & the waves, we saw a cataract of blood mixed with fire, and not many stones' throw from us appear'd and sunk again the scaly fold of a monstrous serpent; at last, to the east, distant about three degrees, appear'd a fiery crest above the waves; slowly it reared like a ridge of golden rocks, till we discover'd two globes

of crimson fire, from which the sea fled away in clouds of smoke; and now we saw it was the head of Leviathan; his forehead was divided into streaks of green & purple like those on a tyger's forehead: soon we saw his mouth & red gills hang just above the raging foam, tinging the black deep with beams of blood, advancing toward us with all the fury of a spiritual existence.

My friend the Angel climb'd up from his station into the mill: I remain'd alone; & then this appearance was no more, but I found myself sitting on a pleasant bank beside a river by moonlight, hearing a harper, who sung to the harp; & his theme was: "The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind."

But I arose and sought for the mill, & there I found my Angel, who, surprised, asked me how I escaped?

I answer'd: "All that we saw was owing to your metaphysics; for when you ran away, I found myself on a bank by moonlight hearing a harper. But now we have seen my eternal lot, shall I shew you yours?" he laugh'd at my proposal; but I by force suddenly caught him in my arms, & flew westerly thro' the night, till we were elevated above the earth's shadow; then I flung myself with him directly into the body of the sun; here I clothed myself in white, & taking in my hand Swedenborg's volumes, sunk from the glorious clime, and passed all the planets till we came to saturn: here I stay'd to rest, & then leap'd into the void between saturn & the fixed stars.

"Here," said I, "is your lot, in this space—if space it may be call'd." Soon we saw the stable and the church, & I took him to the altar and open'd the Bible, and lo! it was a deep pit, into which I descended, driving the Angel before me; soon we saw seven houses of brick; one we enter'd; in it were a number of monkeys,

baboons, & all of that species, chain'd by the middle, grinning and snatching at one another, but withheld by the shortness of their chains: however, I saw that they sometimes grew numerous, and then the weak were caught by the strong, and with a grinning aspect, first-coupled with, & then devour'd, by plucking off first one limb and then another, till the body was left a helpless trunk; this, after grinning & kissing it with seeming fondness, they devour'd too; and here & there I saw one savourily picking the flesh off his own tail, as the stench terribly annoy'd us both, we went into the mill, & I in my hand brought the skeleton of a body, which in the mill was Aristotle's Analytics.

So the Angel said: "thy phantasy has imposed upon me, & thou oughtest to be ashamed."

I answer'd: "we impose on one another, & it is but lost time to converse with you whose works are only Analytics."

Opposition is true Friendship.

I have always found that Angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise; this they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning.

Thus Swedenborg boasts that what he writes is new: tho' it is only the Contents or Index of already publish'd books.

A man carried a monkey about for a shew, & because he was a little wiser than the monkey, grew vain, and conceiv'd himself as much wiser than seven men. It is so with Swedenborg: he shews the folly of churches, & exposes hypocrites, till he imagines that all are religious,

& himself the single one on earth that ever broke a net.

Now hear a plain fact: Swedenborg has not written one new truth. Now hear another: he has written all the old falsehoods.

And now hear the reason. He conversed with Angels who are all religious, & conversed not with Devils who all hate religion, for he was incapable thro' his conceited notions.

Thus Swedenborg's writings are a recapitulation of all superficial opinions, and an analysis of the more sublime—but no further.

Have now another plain fact. Any man of mechanical talents may, from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Behmen, produce ten thousand volumes of equal value with Swedenborg's, and from those of Dante or Shakespear an infinite number.

But when he has done this, let him not say that he knows better than his master, for he only holds a candle in sunshine.

#### A MEMORABLE FANCY

Once I saw a Devil in a flame of fire, who arose before an Angel that sat on a cloud, and the Devil utter'd these words:

"The worship of God is: Honouring his gifts in other men, each according to his genius, and loving the greatest men best: those who envy or calumniate great men hate God; for there is no other God."

The Angel hearing this became almost blue; but mastering himself he grew yellow, & at last white, pink, & smiling, and then replied:

"Thou Idolater! is not God One? & is not he visible in Jesus Christ? and has not Jesus Christ given his sanc-

tion to the law of ten commandments? and are not all other men fools, sinners, & nothings?"

The Devil answer'd: "Bray a fool in a mortar with wheat, yet shall not his folly be beaten out of him; if Jesus Christ is the greatest man, you ought to love him in the greatest degree; now hear how he has given his sanction to the law of ten commandments: did he not mock at the sabbath and so mock the sabbath's God? murder those who were murder'd because of him? turn away the law from the woman taken in adultery? steal the labor of others to support him? bear false witness when he omitted making a defence before Pilate? covet when he pray'd for his disciples, and when he bid them shake off the dust of their feet against such as refused to lodge them? I tell you, no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments. Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse, not from rules."

When he had so spoken, I beheld the Angel, who stretched out his arms, embracing the flame of fire, & he was consumed and arose as Elijah.

NOTE: This Angel, who is now become a Devil, is my particular friend; we often read the Bible together in its infernal or diabolical sense, which the world shall have if they behave well.

I have also The Bible of Hell, which the world shall have whether they will or no.

One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression.

## A SONG OF LIBERTY

1. The Eternal Female groan'd! it was heard over all the Earth.
2. Albion's coast is sick, silent; the American meadows faint!
3. Shadows of Prophecy shiver along by the lakes and the rivers, and mutter across the ocean: France, rend down thy dungeon!
4. Golden Spain, burst the barriers of old Rome!
5. Cast thy keys, O Rome, into the deep down falling, even to eternity down falling,
6. And weep.
7. In her trembling hand she took the new born terror, howling.
8. On those infinite mountains of light, now barr'd out by the atlantic sea, the new born fire stood before the starry king!
9. Flag'd with grey brow'd snows and thunderous visages, the jealous wings wav'd over the deep.
10. The speary hand burned aloft, unbuckled was the shield; forth went the hand of jealousy among the flaming hair, and hurl'd the new born wonder thro' the starry night.
11. The fire, the fire is falling!
12. Look up! look up! O citizen of London, enlarge thy countenance! O Jew, leave counting gold! return to thy oil and wine. O African! black African! (go, winged thought, widen his forehead.)
13. The fiery limbs, the flaming hair, shot like the sinking sun into the western sea.
14. Wak'd from his eternal sleep, the hoary element roaring fled away.

15. Down rush'd, beating his wings in vain, the jealous king; his grey brow'd counsellors, thunderous warriors, curl'd veterans, among helms, and shields, and chariots, horses, elephants, banners, castles, slings, and rocks.

16. Falling, rushing, ruining! buried in the ruins, on Urthona's dens;

17. All night beneath the ruins; then, their sullen flames faded, emerge round the gloomy king.

18. With thunder and fire, leading his starry hosts thro' the waste wilderness, he promulgates his ten commands, glancing his beamy eyelids over the deep in dark dismay,

19. Where the son of fire in his eastern cloud, while the morning plumes her golden breast,

20. Spurning the clouds written with curses, stamps the stony law to dust, loosing the eternal horses from the dens of night, crying:

EMPIRE IS NO MORE! AND NOW THE LION & WOLF SHALL  
CEASE

#### CHORUS

Let the Priests of the Raven of dawn no longer, in deadly black, with hoarse note curse the sons of joy. Nor his accepted brethren—whom, tyrant, he calls free—lay the bound or build the roof. Nor pale religious lechery call that virginity that wishes but acts not!

For every thing that lives is Holy.



# FOR THE SEXES: THE GATES OF PARADISE

(1793-1818)

## FRONTISPIECE



## WHAT IS MAN?

The Sun's Light when he unfolds it  
Depends on the Organ that beholds it.

## [PROLOGUE]

Mutual Forgiveness of each Vice,  
Such are the Gates of Paradise.  
Against the Accuser's chief desne,  
Who walk'd among the Stones of Fire,  
Jehovah's Finger Wrote the Law.  
Then Wept! then rose in Zeal & Awe,  
And the Dead Corpse from Sinai's heat  
Buried beneath his Mercy Seat.  
O Christians, Christians! tell me Why  
You rear it on your Altars high.

[1]



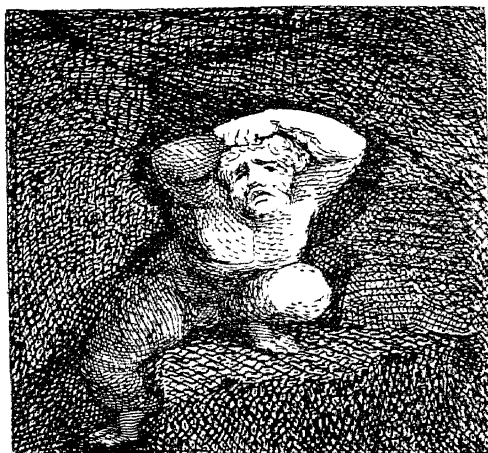
I found him beneath a Tree.

[2]



WATER

Thou Waterest him with Tears:



[3]

EARTH

He struggles into Life

[4]



AIR

On Cloudy Doubts &amp; Reasoning Cares

[5]



FIRE

That end in endless Strife.

